"Law of the Cats"
KENNETH GILBERT

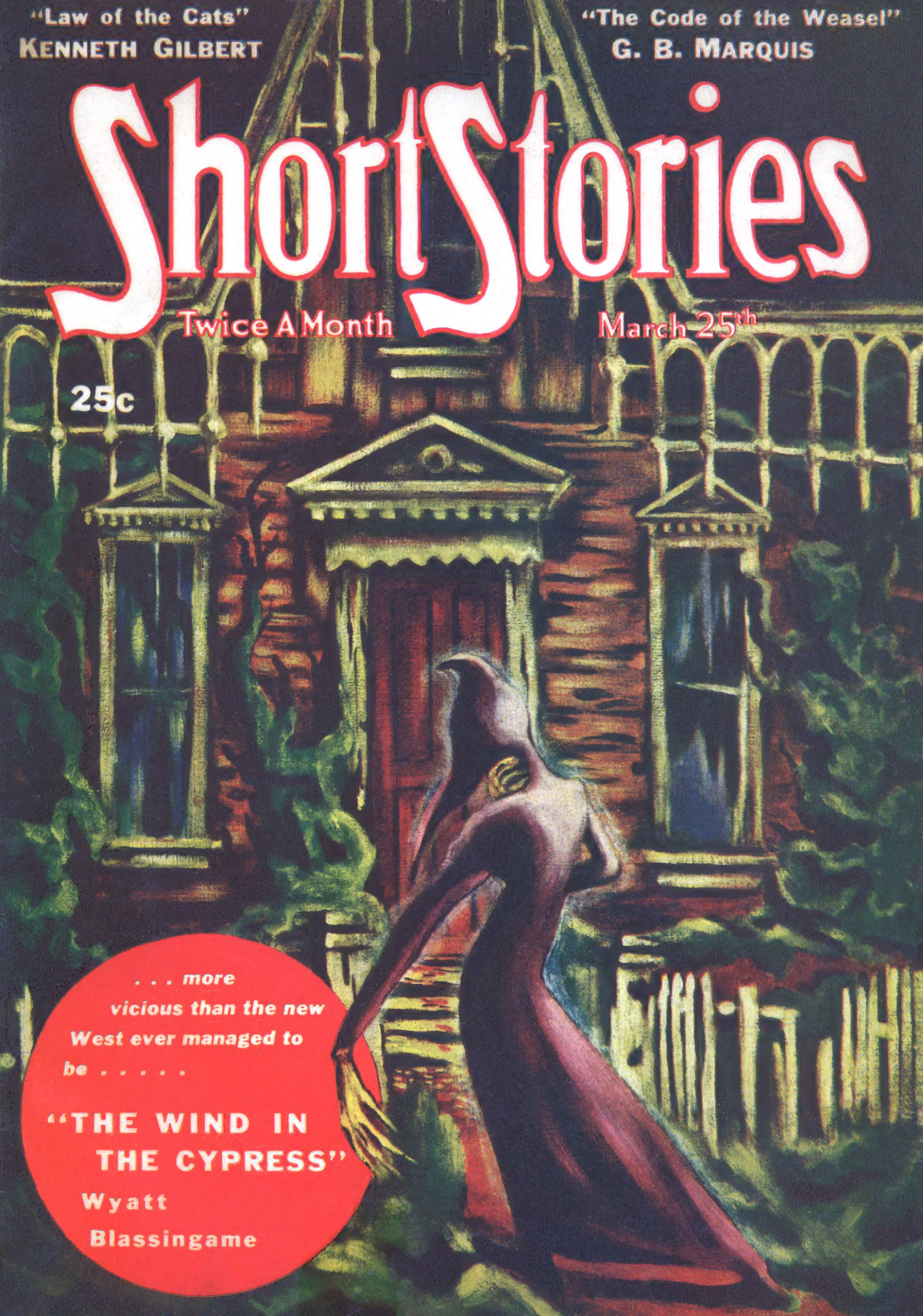
"The Code of the Weasel"
G. B. MARQUIS

Short Stories

Twice A Month

March 25th

25c



. . . more vicious than the new West ever managed to be . . . . .

"THE WIND IN THE CYPRESS"

Wyatt Blassingame

It's getting to be a weekly "Must" with MEN

"You bet I use Listerine Antiseptic and massage every time I wash my hair! I'm no dummy! I know how common and how catching infectious dandruff can be, and how hard it is to get rid of. And, in my book, Listerine Antiseptic is a jim-dandy precaution as well as a slick twice-a-day treatment. Nothing complicated about it at all . . . it's as easy as it is delightful.

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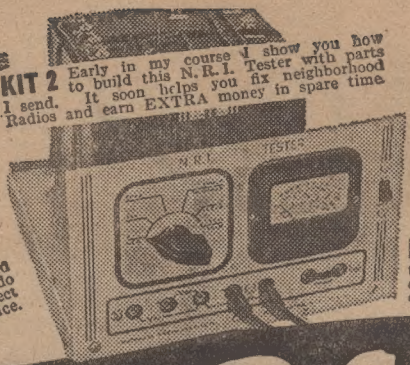
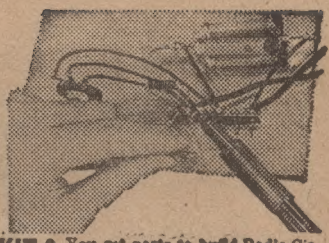


KIT 2 Early in my course I show you how to build this N. R. I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



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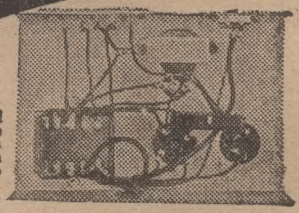

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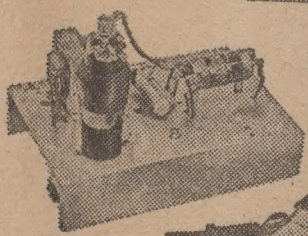

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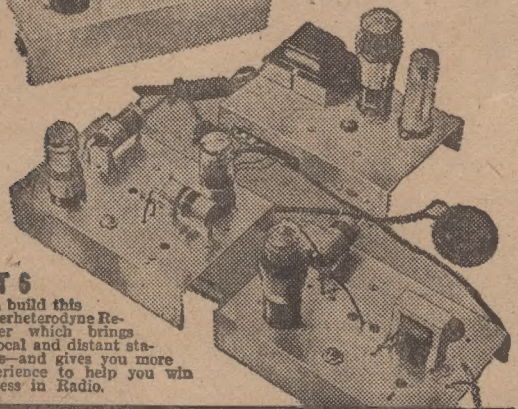

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EDITOR
D. McILWRAITH

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

March 25th, 1947

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.* M. DELANEY, *Secretary.*

The Story Tellers' Circle

"Far Down the Infernal Stair"

A GENTLEMAN with the highly unusual name of Mr. John Jones, a native of Tampa and a volunteer in the army during the Spanish-American war, furnished Wyatt Blassingame with most of the background for the Tampa episodes of "Wind in the Cypress."

"But," continues author Blassingame, *"the official figures themselves give some indication of what must have been happening to what was a small country village late in the 19th century.*

"In 1886 the population of Tampa was given as 1200. In 1900 just 14 years later, the population was 15,839. And at times during the war, as many as 30,000 troops were quartered here. When you remember this was before the days of modern sanitation and assembly line building you get some idea of the congestion.

"For those who think I may have let a fiction writer's imagination gallop too freely in describing Fort Brooke, I'd like to quote from an unfinished article by Mr. Jones dealing with Tampa at the turn of the century—and he was there:

'The prosperity of the Latin section caused by the large payrolls of the cigar factories attracted an undesirable element: gamblers, professional labor agitators, and proprietors of fast houses, and vice began to flourish. The situation was made more difficult to cope with by a small municipality which existed just outside the corporate limits of the city called Fort Brooke and commonly known as Hell's Acres—a name which described it perfectly—for if ever there was a festering sore on the body of a community, this was it. Ruled practically by one man, who possessed such powerful political influence at the Capital that he was able to prevent its annexation to Tampa for many years, the government consisted of himself as mayor and a board of aldermen. There was a respectable part of Fort Brooke, but where it joined Ybor City it consisted of gambling hells, fast houses, and saloons, both white and colored; also a variety theater. Everything was wide open. . . .

'I am not going to delve into the filth of this cesspool of iniquity. It was a horrible example of how low human beings can fall when all moral and legal restraints are removed, and anyone who ever visited this section and witnessed the conditions that existed there could exclaim with the poet:

'I have been far down the Infernal Stair
And seen the Spirits congregated there.'

"As for Dark Gardens, they are purely fictional. But for a number of years I have fished the creeks and lakes of that part of Florida and I don't think the land has changed since William Bartram first saw it, or the Indians before him.

"The catch dogs described in the story are no longer used, due to the advent of the screw worm which infested the wounds made by the dogs' teeth. But formerly these dogs were in common use, along with a bull whip which ranged from 12 to 18 feet in length, and many a Florida cowboy could have made Doug Fairbanks in the old Mark of Zorro *movie look like a novice. The whip too went out with the screw worm, but herd dogs, which bring the cattle out of thickets too thick for a man and horse, are still in use.*

"A very colorful pageant of Indians, soldiers, outlaws from other sections, cowboys and farmers has moved across the Florida prairies. But to me the most colorful thing is the country itself, vast and brooding, and almost untouched by the people who come and go across it."

Wyatt Blassingame

Fellers More Good Than Bad!

THE last time we looked in Caddo Cameron's direction he was spinning some *good* talk on some *bad* people he's known.

We interrupted Mr. Cameron last time to fit him in between our covers; sometimes the Story Tellers' Circle plays orphan around here, getting the space other folks don't want.

But it's another issue and Caddo Cameron

is telling us about a big-time swindler he himself used to work for. (He came from your own home town, Mr. Editor, says Cameron.)

He continues:

"One morning he and his wife found themselves on a bench in Central Park with no jewelry and just a few dimes and nickels in their combined pockets. They still had several trunks of clothes in their Park Avenue apartment—rent paid up until tomorrow, but all their furniture had been removed by installment collectors. I'll call him High Speed because that's the way he did everything, nature having equipped him with an over-drive. So he spends a precious nickel and calls up New York's finest hotel and reserves a suite and tells them to pick up his trunks at the Park Avenue address, he and his wife will come later. Allowing the impressive trunks plenty of time to arrive, they went to their suite and he ordered up a fine breakfast—room service, also four tickets to the best show in town. All this to be charged, of course. After cashing in two of the tickets for tobacco money, he and his wife went to the show and enjoyed it—so he told me. The next day High Speed went out to selling a certain low-grade high-sounding stock and inside of thirty days he had made enough to pay his hotel bill and get out of town with dough.

"A couple of years later he had a large, rapidly-growing concern in a Western city. That's when I went to work for him as sales manager. It wasn't long before I learned that the company's earnings didn't justify such rapid expansion and began to smell a rat—phoney financing. Older employees had been suspecting the same thing. However, it wasn't any of our business. He was a swell guy to work for, so we stayed with him knowing that we were flirting with trouble.

"One day the law swarmed down on us. Never saw so many flatfeet in one building in my life, other than a police station. It looked bad for everybody. But we didn't know High Speed. In effect, he told the law, 'I'm the only guilty person in this whole outfit. Turn them all loose. I'm taking the rap.'

"And he did.

"Nobody will ever convince me that High Speed is all *bad.*

"Almost forgot to tell you. His hobby was canaries. His apartment was always filled with them, and they loved him.

"And I must not forget one of the last of the genuine old-time professional gamblers. Like about a million other people I knew him and I'll call him Hole Card, for stud was his favorite personal game. When just a kid he started out, on the right *side of the green cloth. He knew all the crooked trickery that was ever invented, but never used it in a public game. Why should he, with the percentages all in his favor? That's what he'd tell you as his excuse for being an honest gambler. Several times it was my privilege to talk to him alone at his home when he was in a mood for talk. Once I asked him to name what he considered the world's top sins in the order of their danger to a young fellow. Hole Card named them quick: dope, women, gambling and liquor. I've heard him say, and this is almost a literal quotation, 'Let the wealthiest, smartest and most upright man in the world face me across the green cloth long enough and I'll get everything he's got, including his honor.'*

"That was Hole Card, professional gambler and heavy drinker. He lived in a small town. Far and wide preachers held him up as Satan's oldest and most cherished son, but when they needed an addition to the church, or a playground or library or something like that, they touched Hole Card for the money and got it. I've heard that at one time he supported twenty poor families and did his damndest to keep it a secret. There's real *charity. He was a cheerful man—no crape-hanging in his life. Wherever he passed you'd find laughter behind him, and when it came time for Hole Card to cash in his earthly checks and he opened his eyes and recognized his wife, they tell me that his last words were, 'Howdy, Mom! Six, two and even.'*

"Why shouldn't I take a man like Hole Card and use him as a model for a fictional gambler in the Old West, and give him some good qualities?

"Golly! It's getting late. Time to do the chores. Here I've rambled on and on and haven't even told you about a lot of other fellows I've known, fellows with more bad than good in them, but plumb good nevertheless." *Caddo Cameron*

THE WIND IN THE CYPRESS

By WYATT BLASSINGAME

I LIKE to remember what trains were like in those days because it is so much pleasure not to have to ride them any more. Horses were more comfortable. So I was glad to get off this train in Tampa with all but the last stage of my trip behind me.

Waite Bronson was shouting at me before my feet were on the ground. He came half-running, limping a little, his eyes excited and shining. He was twenty-three years old then, and looked even younger. We shook hands and he said he was very glad to see me and I said, grinning at him, "So they haven't killed you yet."

It was meant as a joke, because I had never really believed the stories he'd told me, but it proved a poor joke. The light went out of his eyes and I could see the fear in them. "No," he said. "Not yet."

"Has someone tried?"

"It might have been an accident." And then abruptly, he was smiling, happy again. "At least there's nothing to worry about here," he said, and apparently forgot the whole thing, helping to gather up my bags and carry them out to where a carriage was waiting. "You could have ridden the train right on to the hotel grounds," he said, "but I thought you'd like to drive through the town."

It was scarcely two years since I had sailed from Tampa for Cuba and the Spanish-American war, but I could see changes in the city. Some of the wild confusion, the uniforms, the pack-jamming of people was gone. Before the war Tampa had been a country town with a harbor, and almost overnight they pushed in a whole army and navy. It was a madhouse, with nothing like it in

Menace Hung Over the Whole Countryside; Murder Had Been Done, Could So Easily Happen Again

any war since that I know of. But now, at the turn of the century, you could see the place was going to grow up to be a city. The main streets were paved with cypress blocks on which the horse's hoofs drummed softly.

WE TALKED about this and about things as they had been in '98. Through the palms and the water oaks the Tampa Bay Hotel loomed up ahead: a huge, sprawling, architectural monster that always looked to me like an octopus with half a dozen Moslem spires sticking up from each tentacle. It was the guadiest and swankiest thing on the Florida west coast.

Just before we reached the hotel Waite Bronson said, "One of my relatives came with me, ostensibly on business, but I think it was to meet you."

"Yes?" I said, and all at once I was remembering the picture I had seen of his cousin Janice.

"It's Brud Cammett," he said.

I felt curiously let down, and asked, "Which one is he?"

"The conceited one." Even as Waite spoke his face changed. He had always been like that; moods could pass over him faster than clouds over a moon. Many a man in our troop in Cuba had said Waite Bronson had a streak of insanity in him, and Waite had laughed and said his whole family was crazy—and I had never been sure how seriously he meant this. Now as he spoke the fear showed in his eyes again and the lines of his face looked drawn.

I said, "Could this Cammett be the one who killed your father and your older brother?"

"Sure. It could be any of them." And then his face changed again. "But I've played a trick on them, Charlie. And on you, too."

"I hope you kept it moderate," I said, remembering one night in Cuba when he had fired over the heads of a patrol and

started everyone to shooting at everyone else. He'd been nicked in the leg that night, but still thought it was a good joke.

"I told them you were a former detective, coming here to find the murderer. And that's not all."

"No?"

THE carriage had stopped in front of the hotel and Waite was looking at me with his eyes glittering and impish. "No," he said. "I've fixed it so the killer may take a whack at you before he tries to finish me off. But if he does, Charlie, I'll catch him." He swung down from the carriage, still grinning.

Waite had reserved a room for me, and in it a table was loaded with buckets of ice and glasses and champagne and liquor bottles. "I told you we'd have a reunion if you ever came down here," he said. So we drank one bottle of champagne just for a starter. Then Waite went to his own room and I went to bathe off some of the grime and sweat of the trip.

Soaking in a tub big enough to wash a horse in, I thought about Waite Bronson. It seemed curious to me, even then, that he and I had ever become friends. I was seven years older. Also, I don't like practical jokers; yet in a way it had been this which first attracted me to him, for the jokes were his method of striking back at persons who had teased or abused him. He was too small to defend himself physically, and in the cavalry he had been the butt of many jokesters. I had taken up for him a few times, until I learned, along with everybody else, that he had his own ways of getting revenge. And revenge for any insult or injury he would have.

I could remember the way he had looked the night he first told me about the deaths of his father and older brother. We were drinking rum in some Cuban town and neither of us too sober, and he told me that both his father and brother had been murdered.

"Father first," he said. "That was four years ago. He had been out on the range and he came back, one foot stuck in the stirrup, the horse dragging him. We knew the horse was wild and so it could have been an accident. Everyone said it was."

"And your brother?"

"That was about six months later. I found him on the ground under the observatory. His neck was broken—well, he could have fallen."

"Then what makes you think it was murder?"

He looked at me with the fear showing like a shadow behind the bright glitter of his eyes. "I *know* it was! And I know that sooner or later they'll kill me. They've tried before. They'll keep on until they do!"

"Who will?"

"One of my ever-loving relatives, or somebody for one of them. Or maybe all of them. I don't know."

"You're crazy," I said. "Why would they want to kill you?"

He flashed that wild, animalish smile that would change his whole face for an instant. "Money. It was my grandfather who made it and it went to father, and then to Lloyd, my brother, and then to me. The rest of them have enough to get by on, but I have most of it. And they don't even know how much it is."

He didn't volunteer to tell me how much it was either. I took a pull at my rum and asked him who would get the money if he was killed.

"All of them would get some. Or maybe dog eat dog with one coming out on top. "I don't have any will."

"Then why the devil don't you make a will, and leave the money to charity? With none of them making a profit there would be no sense in killing you."

It was then I began to get some measure of this small, quick-laughing youngster. "A will would mean nothing in that country. There would be nobody to enforce it." He looked straight at me. "Besides I might never learn who killed Lloyd and my father. This way, whoever did it will try again, at me. And I'll find out who it is!"

I didn't put much faith in the story, then, thought it was obvious that Waite believed it. But I had drunk a lot of rum, which is the reason I said, "I used to be a detective." (Actually, I'd been a deputy sheriff for six months.) "After the war I'll go home with you and help."

It was the sort of thing that soldiers have been telling one another in every war and we both pretended to believe it and both knew that really it wasn't true. I was sent

back to the States before Waite and went to my family home in Kansas. But I was restless and couldn't settle down. Now it seems to me that all that time I was looking for something, but didn't know what it was. Anyway I drifted about for a while. There wasn't any GI Bill of Rights in those days; jobs were scarce, especially the kind with much money and little work. Finally the letter from Waite caught up with me, asking me to visit him in Florida. And reading it I remembered the stories he had told me about his relatives—and I remembered the picture he had showed me of his cousin Janice who lived in the house with him. To tell the truth, I remembered the picture more clearly than the stories.

"In a couple of days," I thought, lying there in the tub, "I'll meet her." The thought gave me a curious, almost frightened sensation. I was thirty years old then and had known a full share of girls in my day, and it surprised and shocked me a little that I should feel like this about a woman I had never met.

A half hour later Waite Bronson knocked on my door, and came in with another man. "Charlie," Waite said, "this is my cousin, Brud Cammett. Brud, Mr. Charles Lane."

Brud Cammett was the most handsome man I have ever seen. He was handsome almost to the point of being beautiful and yet there was nothing feminine about him. Around my age, he was just a shade under six feet with plenty of width in his shoulders, flat narrow hips, and an easy way of carrying himself. His hair was the color of yellow rice and his eyes were bright blue.

Waite had said that Brud Cammett was "the conceited one" of his relatives and it was soon apparent that he had told the truth. Not that he was insufferable; his conceit wasn't even annoying. It was just that the man wore complete confidence in himself like he wore his clothes. But he was courteous and a very pleasant companion.

We started drinking in my room. Now Waite was small, but he was a powerful man with a bottle and a champion for his size. I have always fancied I was able to hold my share of the liquor, and this Brud Cammett just poured it down without visible effect.

It was the beginning of what turned out to be quite a night. We left the hotel and made a tour of Ybor City; that's the Latin part of the town and it was pretty tough in those days. There was a variety theater, the like of which New York never had a chance to close. We danced with the girls. It was fun to watch them fall over themselves trying to get at Bud Cammett. He not only could have had anything in the place free, he could have made money. But we moved on and there were blackjack games (poker was too slow for us that night) and crap games, and somewhere along the way I noticed that Waite Bronson was throwing Spanish doubloons on the table. Spanish gold had been common exchange in Florida fifteen or twenty years before, at fifteen dollars to the gold piece, but it wasn't common any more. And not in the quantity that Waite Bronson was carrying in a money-belt around his waist.

WE MOVED on, out of Ybor City into that section known as Fort Brooke. I am almost eighty years old now, and I have not wasted much of my time, at least not during the first half, but I have never seen a spot where pure Sin of any and all types was thicker per square foot than in the old Fort Brooke. The streets were sand and the sidewalks were board, where there were any sidewalks at all. The buildings were chiefly shacks. There were occasional street lamps that gave a yellow, smoky light, and light spilled out of some of the buildings, so that the night was a whirling pattern of dim gold and black and the sound of voices and laughter and of shouted curses and the cries of drunken women and figures that moved from yellow light into darkness, and maybe now and then the distinctive sound of a pistol. After the pistol all the other noises would cease for a moment, the way crickets and frogs will stop their chirping after some violent sound, so that the whole night seems to have grown still and expectant, waiting to see what happens next. Then, little by little, the sounds begin again, and the night moves on toward its destiny.

It was soon after we had come into the Fort Brooke section that, looking back, I saw a figure wading through one of the pools of light and noticed something familiar about it. A few minutes later, on another street, I saw the man again. I told Waite we were being followed.

"Maybe it's a girl," Waite said. "They are always running after Brud."

"This man's been after us since Ybor City."

"Probably after some of the gold that Waite's been throwing around," Brud said. "He's a fool to be reaching into that money-belt in places where people can see him."

I asked if either of them had a gun and they shook their heads. "We won't need one," Brud said carelessly, confidently. "The three of us are able to take care of any trouble."

"It might not hurt to borrow one," I said.

"Borrow?" Brud said. "Where?"

"This next bar," I said. "If the management hasn't changed since I was here as a soldier."

There is something timeless and basically elemental about Florida jooks. They may vary in appearance and price, but there is a nameless similarity that permeates them all. Even now when I enter one, carrying most of my weight on a cane, I can feel this thing in the dim heat, smell it in the odors of the place, and all the old memories come crowding back so that for a little while it does not matter that my hair is white.

This one was a long room with a bar along the side, a single huge lamp overhead, a few tables and chairs. I knew that in the back there were quiet rooms for big-money gambling and a room for dancing also. We lined up at the bar and ordered rum and I asked one of the girls if Cherry was there.

Her hair was very blonde and her skin dark. She looked me over, and then took Brud by the arm. "What do you want with Cherry?" she asked.

I said, "Tell her Charlie Lane wants to see her."

She looked from me to Brud and Brud smiled at her. She said, "Don't go away, Handsome. I'll be back."

When she was gone Brud said, "You seem to have got around a bit."

"I was in the army," I said. "It was my patriotic duty."

Cherry came out, and the two years I had been away hadn't changed her. She was somewhere in her middle thirties and the flesh was firm on her bones and her hair was red, and her mouth was full and lush. I remember that the evening dress she wore was all white. She gave me both hands, saying, "Charlie! Captain Charlie Lane!"

"Mr. Lane," I said. "The war's over."

"What are you doing here? How long are you going to stay?"

I introduced her to Waite and Brud. She looked at Brud with interest, as any woman would, but not too much interest. I was still holding her hands and she said, "It's been a long time, Charlie."

"A very long time," I said. "Let's have a drink."

That's when the man who had been following us came in. I recognized him by the way he moved, a big, slow-gaited man with a bull neck and in bad need of a shave. He came and stood beside me at the bar, and when the bartender gave me my drink this man picked it up and drank it in a single gulp.

I looked at him, and then at the door. Beyond the door a shadow moved, and was gone. I looked back at the man and he said, "Well?" His eyes were small and vicious.

"Well, you're thirstier than I am," I said. And to the bartender, "Give us two more. One for this—gentleman, and one for me."

BRUD CAMMETT was watching me with quiet curiosity, like a man at a play which isn't too interesting. Waite was staring, his mouth open, his face getting white, and I knew his temper would snap in a moment. Beside me Cherry said, very softly, "What is it, Charlie?"

I couldn't answer because the man was watching too closely. The bartender slid our drinks forward and I lifted mine with my right hand. "Salud," I said. He picked his up and put it to his lips and when he did I hit his wrist with my left hand. The rum splashed over his face. In the moment while he was blind I stuck my left knee into his groin. This bent him forward so I could get all my weight back of the right, the blow straightening him, spinning him half around, and then I had him with my left arm around his waist, holding him in front of me. The pistol was in his hip pocket and I got it without trouble.

I pushed the man to the front door and looked out past him. There were two more men in the shadows. "Here he is," I said, and heaved him at them, holding the gun

ready in my right hand. They let him fall on his face without moving to catch him. I went back to the bar.

"There were two more outside," I said. "They were waiting for this first one to start a roughhouse; then in the confusion they'd come in and give Waite a rush for his money-belt."

"It would serve the fool right for the way he flashes his gold around," Brud said. The girl who had gone for Cherry was back now, hanging on Brud's arm, and he went with her toward the dance floor in the back.

Cherry said, "Are you hurt, Charlie?"

"A skinned spot on my knuckles."

Waite said, "I was beginning to think something had happened to you since Cuba. When you ordered that drink for the fellow I thought you were a hell of a man to have down here to help me."

Cherry said, "Let's go back to my room and talk, Charlie. I've got a thousand questions I want to ask you." And then she screamed and pushed me so that I stumbled against Waite; and in the same instant there was the sound of the shot, muffled and mingled with the slash of the bullet into the bar.

I was still holding the gun. Spinning, I hit a chair, reeled backward, and saw the one big lamp overhead. I shot it just as the gun outside fired again and the lamp went into a thousand pieces and darkness struck down on the room.

I made the door and outside and around the corner. Here the quiet of the night seemed to push back at the sounds from inside the building. Then Waite was shouting, "Hey, Charlie! Where are you?" Other persons began to pour out. Brud Cammett showed up with a girl clinging to his arm, wanting to know what had happened.

"Somebody took a shot at me through the window," I said.

"Maybe," Waite said. "Maybe it was me."

Both Brud and I stared at him. For a moment I didn't know what he meant. I had been thinking of the man I had slugged and of his companions, and the idea that it might be anything else hadn't occurred to me.

"It's always like that," Waite said. "It always could have been an accident, been something else."

Brud said, "Are you back on that phobia of yours that someone is trying to kill you?" Then he smiled, a beautiful, almost angelic smile. "Because I am the only one of your relatives in Tampa tonight, Waite, and I wouldn't be fool enough to try to kill you under those circumstances. Besides—" he paused just a moment—"if I try, I won't fail."

"I wonder if it is you," Waite said. "I wonder—" He turned to me. "I've had enough for the night. Let's go."

Brud said, "Are you excluding me?"

"Not if you can shake off the women," Waite told him. "I'm safer with you in sight."

We got a carriage and rode back to the hotel. What had happened, I thought, was simply the kind of trouble it was easier to get into than to stay out of while in Fort Brooke. But if it wasn't that—? The bullet had missed both Waite and me by inches. It could have been meant for either.

BRUD CAMMETT had been wrong when he said he was the only one of Waite's relatives in Tampa. The next morning when I started down to breakfast I saw Waite talking to a thick-set man with a heavy-featured, ruthless face. There was a sense of power about the man, in the set of his features, in the very way he stood. Waite introduced him as "Another one of my cousins, Mr. Carey Russell. It seems Carey came to Tampa yesterday to sell some livestock."

We shook hands and the man had a grip like a vise. "You are the friend that Waite is having down for a visit?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll probably see more of you."

He swung around and introduced me to another man that I hadn't noticed before. I was to learn later that most persons didn't notice Tom Smith. He had a manner of withdrawing from a group or conversation that was almost disappearing, and he spoke so seldom that when he did it caught his listener by surprise. He was a man of about average size with a lean, dark face and a mouth so thin it was almost invisible. "Smith is my foreman," Carey Russell told me. "You will probably see him around, too."

"Do you all live with Waite?"

Russell gave a harsh snort of laughter.

"Hell, no. I'm a cattleman. I work for my living. But we go into the same town to get drunk on Saturday night."

We talked for a few moments and then Smith touched Carey Russell on the arm, said, "I better see about them cows." Those were the only words he spoke during that first meeting and perhaps that's the reason, the surprise of hearing him speak at all, that I noticed his voice.

I said, "You've got more of a West Texas, New Mexico accent than a Florida one."

He just looked at me, his face dark and quiet, and did not answer. Carey Russell told him all right, go look after the cows, and he went out. I noticed that he was wearing high-heeled boots, and in those days the Florida cattlemen didn't often use Western boots.

I said, "I used to be a deputy sheriff in New Mexico."

Carey Russell looked at me out of his hard, almost colorless eyes. "Then you'll be interested in ranching Florida style." I told him I would and he said, "Maybe Silent Tom will explain it to you." This evidently struck him as funny for he burst into deep, harsh laughter.

At breakfast Waite told me that we wouldn't leave until afternoon, so that we could go with Russell and his cowhands. "It'll be safer that way."

"Yes?"

"I don't mean my personal troubles. It's just that the country between here and Palm Center is pretty wild. The law is chiefly left up to the individuals and there are bushwackers who don't hesitate to take a crack at two or three men if they think the men carry money enough to make it worthwhile. Besides—"

"Go ahead," I said.

"Carey has been feuding with some of the other cattlemen. It develops into open warfare at times, with everybody stealing everybody else's cattle and shooting it out if caught. I've an idea Carey steals his share, maybe more than his share. And there are men who have sworn to get even."

I had heard of the Florida cattle country—that it was not only wilder and more primitive at the turn of the century than the West ever managed to be, it was more vicious and that life was not only cheap, it was often savage and despicable. I asked Waite if it would not be safer to travel without Carey Russell under the circumstances.

"No," Waite said. "Carey runs the ranch to suit himself. The cattle are his, whatever he makes on them is his—and I think he's doing all right. But most of the land in that country is mine, so I get some of the blame for Carey's work. I'm generally thought to be in partnership with him."

"Are you?"

"I don't try to stop him. He was running the ranch when Father was killed. I don't want to change things for him, or for any of them. Because this way I have the best chance of learning who killed Father and Lloyd."

But I still didn't put complete faith in that story, and I used the morning to ride out to Fort Brook and see Cherry in the hope of learning just what had happened last night. I remembered the way she had screamed and shoved me, and that shove had saved my life—if the bullet had been fired at me. I wanted to thank her, and I wanted to learn just what it was she had seen outside the window; maybe the face of the gunman, maybe just the gleam of light on a gun barrel. I wanted to know.

A Negro was mopping up the front room. Behind the bar a big man was washing glasses and straightening up. Even in mid-morning the light was dim in the place without the lamp overhead. I said good morning to the Negro and to the man behind the bar, kept going.

The man came out from behind the bar. I hadn't realized before how very big he was. "Where you going, Bud?"

"I want to see Cherry."

"She ain't up yet."

"She'll see me," I said, and went on, the barman standing there looking after me.

I knocked on the door of Cherry's room and there wasn't any answer. But the door wasn't locked; she didn't keep it locked because people she didn't want to see knew better than to try to come in. I went in and the little sitting room was the way it always had been, full of lace and satin dolls and beaded lampshades. I went across to the bedroom door and knocked and opened that.

She was lying in bed and for just a moment I thought she was asleep. The redhair was spread over the pillow and her face

was relaxed, without paint, strangely youthful and sad. The knife had been driven between her breasts, closer to the left breast than to the right, sloping leftward. When I touched her she was cold; clammy. It is a feel I can still remember because she had been so warm and alive on other times.

There wasn't anything overturned in the room, nothing out of place. I went back through her sitting room, opened the door into the hall outside. The barman was standing not ten feet away, looking at me.

"Come in," I told him.

He followed me back into her bedroom, stopping at the door and actually looking embarrassed so that it would have been funny at some other time. Then he saw the knife. He stared at it. And without any change on his face he took a blackjack from his pocket and started at me.

"Wait a minute!" I said. "I didn't do it."

HE KEPT coming. "Feel her," I said. "Go feel her."

He did, backing me away from him so that all the time he was between me and the door. He touched her hand with his left hand, and he jerked back as though he had been burned.

"She's been dead for hours," I said. "I couldn't have killed her."

His face broke the way a china vase might break if he had struck it with the blackjack. He went down on his knees, burying his face in the bed covers—and there was the awful choking sound of a man's sobbing.

I said, "Did anybody come back here late last night, or early this morning?"

"I didn't see them," he said. "I didn't see them."

I left him kneeling there beside the bed. In the front of the bar the Negro still worked with his mop and bucket and I went past him into the white, hot glare of the sun.

Back at the hotel it was as though I had moved out of one world into another, or had been awakened from some strange dream and plunged into the affairs of the day. Brud Cammett was on the shaded hotel lawn talking to two girls. Waite found me to say we would have an early lunch and get started toward Palm Center. He seemed to have forgotten last night, and I did not mention Cherry to him nor to anyone else.

WE RODE out of Tampa while the shadows of the horses were still close underfoot. It was quite a party; besides Waite and Brud Cammett and me there were two ox-drawn wagons with drivers, and Carey Russell and Tom Smith and two other cowhands. In those days the Florida cowboy did not go for the fancy trappings of the West. These men wore patched dungarees and shoes that might have been borrowed from a cottonfield Negro and their faces were sallow and lean beneath the wide brims of their hats. But they sat the small, raw-boned horses like men bred in the saddle and they carried well-oiled and clean rifles. Tom Smith was the only man who wore a pistol. He wore it low on his thigh where his hand naturally hung close to it.

I had heard of the Florida woods from Waite and from others, but I had never seen them except through a train window. Viewed that way they are like a picture, unreal and impersonal. Now we moved out of Tampa and the cypress block paving gave way to crushed limerock, the limerock to sand streets, and then the streets were gone and almost suddenly we were plunged into a country that is like none other on earth that I know of.

But there is an extinct volcano on the Hawaiian Island of Maui and that great, desolate, barren crater bears a weird emotional kinship to the Florida woods: A feeling that here time has died and the centuries can no longer touch or change this land which stretches away like an empty sea into the curve of the sky. The scrub pines blunt and bend the vision like a mist, but do not stop it; the oak hammocks are ghostly under the drapes of Spanish moss; in the shallow lakes the herons and egrets hunt their food by standing motionless, looking like grotesque flowers dropped from the moon.

Through this country we rode without seeming to move at all. One dark, coffee-colored lake gave way to another; a cypress island would rise in front of us, those beautiful lacy trees the only real green in all that land, and we would ride past it, and somewhere in the distance would be another. We made camp that night, moved on again the next day, through the dry pleasant heat of a Florida spring. It was an uneventful

journey, but during it I learned at least two things of note.

One was the use of catch dogs. We were taking no cattle with us, but the two dogs which Carey Russell and his men had used on the drive to Tampa trotted along now in the shadow of the wagons, gaunt, flop-eared creatures with a vicious look about them.

I mentioned them to Carey, saying they did not appear to be the sort of dog a stranger wants to scratch behind the ears.

"They are catch dogs," Carey said. "Haven't you ever seen them work?"

"We didn't have them in the West."

"I'll show you."

Through all this country cattle roamed at large—emaciated, deer-wild creatures with great curving horns, bigger horns than either a Spanish or Mexican matador would care to see in the bull-ring. We sighted several of them and Carey called the dogs from under the wagon.

THEY were beautifully trained. They cut one steer from the herd, circled him, baying, holding him where he was with his head down, his long horns reaching first for one dog and then the other. And then, at Carey's order, they closed in. One nipped at a hind leg; the steer swung, and as he did so the other dog hurled himself in between the horns and his teeth fastened on the steer's nose. In the instant the other was lashing at the ankles and a moment later the steer was down.

Carey Russell called them off then, laughing, his heavy face flushed with excitement. "I love to watch them work," he said.

The steer was bleeding from a gash above his nose, another along the right hind leg. "It's sort of rough on the cattle," I said.

Carey grinned at me. "I could set them on you just as easily." And then he turned and looked at Waite Bronson. He was still grinning, but it wasn't a good grin. "They'd like a chance at you," he said. "Remember that time you gave them some meat with red pepper in it for a joke?"

"I'll give them a couple of rifle bullets, if they bother me," Waite told him.

I asked, "Are you the only person who can handle them, Mr. Russell?"

He said they were trained to work for any cowhand. And he added, "Tom Smith took to 'em handily, even though you don't have 'em in the West."

The other thing I learned was that Brud Cammett was a horticulturist of some note. I had noticed that on several occasions he stopped to examine wild plants, and one plant he very carefully dug up and put into a wagon. "He'll transplant it into the gardens at home," Waite told me. "Those gardens are the only thing he really cares about."

"Other than women?" I said.

"Other than himself," Waite said. "He doesn't really give a damn about women. They flatter him, and he tolerates them because of that. But the gardens—on that subject he's crazy."

"What kind of gardens?"

Waite's face was always expressive as weather, and now I had the impression that thinking about these gardens depressed, or even half-frightened him. "Grandfather started them," he said. "He collected plants and flowers from all over the world. After his death no one paid much attention to them—except Brud. He doesn't do anything else."

"How does he earn a living? Or does he?"

WAITE looked back at Brud Cammett, riding beside the wagon in which he had put the plant. "He makes money out of the gardens, or says he does. He develops new types of plants. I don't know much about it."

"Your cousin Janice must like the gardens," I said.

He looked at me, his face dark as if a shadow lay upon it. "Yes," he said. "To walk in. To look at. They match her disposition."

It seemed a strange thing to say because of the look upon his face, the tone of his voice. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"You'll see. I told you my whole family was crazy."

I asked one more question; perhaps it was his use of the "crazy" that had reminded me. "You do have another relative, don't you, besides Brud and Carey Russell and Janice?"

"You mean Uncle Ben Stevens." His black mood was gone as suddenly as it had come upon him and he laughed. "We've

got a couple of barrels of Tampa Bay water in one of the wagons for him."

"What?"

"He's working on a method to get gold out of sea water; there actually is a tiny amount of gold in salt water, I understand. Anyway, it keeps him happy—two barrels of sea water, and one of rum."

AT DUSK we rode into the small town of Palm Center, and here Carey Russell with Tom Smith and the other cowhands left us. Russell shook hands before leaving. "From what Waite says," he told me, "I'll probably see you around." Then he laughed, that short, harsh laughter that may have been real mirth and may not.

Tom Smith neither shook hands nor said goodbye.

Brud and Waite and I rode on across the town. "Dark Gardens is about a mile out," Waite said.

"What is?" It was the first time I had heard the name.

"Dark Gardens. That's the name of the gardens, the name of the big house, too."

Brud said, "Waite lives in the big house with Janice. I live in the gardener's lodge." His voice held a quiet note of humor and he was smiling when he spoke.

And so in the early light, a full moon rising, the air cool and very still, with no hint of wind, we came to Dark Gardens.

There was a wall of cypress, green-black against the sky with the top silver-tipped by the moon. Where a road had been cut we rode through the cypress, but to right and left, wherever the moon touched, we could see the cypress knees, those weirdly shaped lumps of wood rising from the ground. Then we came out into the moonlight and into a vast sea of lilies. And at that moment a whippoorwill began its melancholy crying.

Perhaps it was the name of the place, or the way Waite Bronson had spoken of it, or perhaps that black, serrated fortress of cypress that bound it off from the outer world; and it may have been, coming at that moment, the crying of the whippoorwill, which always has been to me a sound of utter loneliness and despair; but from those first moments I began to sense the atmosphere of gloom and of unnatural depression, which to me at least, seemed always to overhang the place. There were too many flowers here. In some strange way Dark Gardens missed beauty as a blanket of flowers upon a grave will miss it. And I wondered then what Waite had meant when he compared the gardens with his Cousin Janice.

The driveway curved on past dark pools on which floated lily pads that must have been six feet in diameter, past banked azaleas, towering columns of bamboo, flowering and perfumed shrubs that made grotesque shadows in the moonlight. Then ahead of us loomed up something huge and dark, and Waite Bronson said, "There's the house."

Brud seemed to awake from a half dream. He reined in his horse and held out his hand to me, smiling. "I turn off here. My place is over this way, about two hundred yards. Look me up tomorrow and I'll show you about the gardens."

He rode off down a side lane and I asked Waite, "Does he live over there alone? He isn't married, is he?"

"He isn't married."

"Aren't any of your relatives married?"

"Carey is. But I don't think he lets that trouble him much."

I could see the house clearly in the moonlight now. Waite said, "Grandfather came from South Carolina, so he set out here to building himself a Southern mansion."

It was beautiful, or rather it must have been years before. Two and a half stories, it managed to catch that perfect grace and

symmetry which so few buildings have. Tall columns spaced along the front porch held, high up, a second porch or observatory. But the railing around this observatory was broken in one place, the remnants sagging

out into space. And the whole building was a dirty gray instead of the white it once had been. A shutter on one window hung slightly askew.

There was no light visible anywhere.

Waite stopped his horse, looking up at the broken rail on the observatory. "There's where my brother fell." And then he leaned forward, his hand hard on my arm, his small, intent face almost touching mine. "Only he didn't fall, Charlie. He didn't fall. He was thrown."

When he leaned back in his saddle he was breathing hard. "You'll see," he said. "You'll see!"

And with that he seemed to dismiss the affair, turning instantly into the perfect host. "What we need is a bath and some drinks." He was shouting for servants even as he swung down from his horse.

We left our horses with the Negro who had driven the supply wagon and went up the moonlit steps, across the wide porch. But the moonlight did not reach the door of the house and Waite paused here. "Ulla!" he shouted.

Off in the darkness, there was a pale flutter of light; the light steadied and grew brighter and I could see that it was a lamp, a woman carrying it toward us down a long corridor. As she drew closer I could see her face, a dark leather-brown, the skin smooth and ageless. *A Negro,* I thought. *A mulatto rather.* And then, *Seminole. She's Indian, or part Indian.*

Waite spoke to her; I don't remember what he said. She did not seem to hear him. She came straight to me, holding the lamp up so that the light shone full in my face, and for perhaps five seconds she held it there, staring at me.

"You the man Mr. Waite brought home with him?"

"Yes," I said.

Waite said, "This is Mr. Lane, Ulla. Mr. Charlie Lane. Show him to his room."

"Yes, sir. I got a room ready for him."

"Which one?" Waite asked.

"The front one. On the observatory. The one Mr. Lloyd had." And with no change in her voice she said to me, "Come on. I'll show you."

A spiral staircase lifted out of the gloom as lightly as a bird and we went up this, turned forward again along another hallway, and into the room where I was to stay.

It was a big room with four-poster bed, a large rosewood table. The woman put the lamp on the table. "You washes in there," she said, pointing.

"Thank you."

She stepped backward to where the light reached her dimly, smooth and gold on her face. "You knew Mr. Waite in Cuba when he was in the army?"

"Yes."

"How well you knew him?"

"Rather well. Why?"

"He has spells. He imagines things that was never so. Maybe he dreams them. Was he like that down there?"

"He had no spells," I said. "What kind of spells?"

"Spells," she said. And turned and left me.

MY GEAR was brought up while I was bathing. I shaved and dressed, putting on a white suit I had bought in Cuba and knotting a black sash around the waist. I could hear no sound at all in the house, except those of my own making. That house had been put together of thick heart-lumber, meant to endure. Sounds did not travel far through its walls and floors.

At the end of the room were two large French windows which opened onto the observatory. I pushed one wide and stepped out into the moonlight.

Directly in front of me there was a chair, but not the sort of chair you would expect to find on an exposed porch. It was big, upholstered, with the upholstery rotting away now from rain and sun, fragments of gold fringing hanging from it. It had been a very expensive chair once. It sat here now, damp from the last rain.

And not two feet from it the broken rail of the observatory sagged out into space. If the rail had not been broken a man could have sat in that chair and rested his feet upon the rail.

Below me the gardens lay quiet in the moonlight; pale masses of flowers and dark shrubs and moon-frosted pools; on the still air there was a blending of perfumes, all the flowers of Florida, the lush thick blossoms of the tropics, the exotic plants of foreign lands.

I put my hands on what was left of the

rail, tested it, then leaned forward and looked over to the spot where Lloyd Bronson must have fallen.

A girl was standing there, gazing out across the gardens. Her hair was dark, her dress white as the moonflowers growing beside her. She stood quietly. Motionless, as though waiting for something which might be a long time in coming.

Then, slowly, she turned and looked up to where I leaned over the rail. At that distance her face was only a pale blurr.

"Charles Lane?" she said.

"Yes."

"There is still time to walk in the gardens before supper."

I went down the stairs and out to where she waited. She was taller than I had thought, slender, with long black hair massed at the back of her neck. Her face was oval, the features delicately, beautifully molded, yet there was something set and almost immobile about them.

"You are Waite's cousin, Janice," I said. "I saw the picture of you he had in Cuba."

"I was never sure why he took that picture with him."

"Did you ever know a soldier who didn't like to carry the picture of a beautiful woman?"

We went down a path with banked, white azaleas on either side. From one of the pools a night heron flapped awkwardly into the sky, and somewhere, sounding far away and hopeless, the whippoorwill kept crying. "Like a lost spirit," Janice said. "Haunting the gardens and always calling for what it knows it will never find."

"What?" I said.

"The whippoorwill. I listen to it night after night, and never see it. You can find the mockingbirds when they sing at night, the owls and the night herons. But the whippoorwill is always ahead of you, fading away."

"I don't think I have ever actually seen one."

"You can shine their eyes with a lantern. With a bright lantern their eyes glow bright red."

"Do you often go shining whippoorwill eyes?"

"Brud showed me. He likes the whippoorwill, now that he knows he can kill it when he wishes."

I looked at her. Her face was clear in the moonlight, quiet, composed. "Does Brud like to kill?" I asked.

"I did not mean that. Only that he likes to feel there is nothing beyond his reach, nothing that he can't have if he wants it. And because of that he can never be really satisfied." She tore a handful of blossoms from an azalea. "Look. One is as pretty as the other. But Brud Cammett must try to satiate beauty by piling one on top another, thousand on thousand. That's why there are so many flowers here they cease to be beautiful and are oppressive instead. That's why Brud will always fail."

I said, "He struck me as a man pretty confident of winning."

"Because most things come to him so easily. But he wants to feel there is nothing beyond him. That's why as a boy he hunted down whippoorwills, not to kill them but to learn that he could. That's the cancer that's in him that he can't cure."

She flung the blossoms into a pool and they floated on the dark water like bits of foam.

"This must seem a strange conversation to you." She looked toward me, but the moon was behind her and I could see only the lovely outline of her face, the sheen of the moonlight on her hair. "But I have so little to do except walk here in the gardens and think, make up imaginary conversations. You see, I have been talking to you in my imagination since Waite first told us you were coming."

"Waite told me you liked to walk in the gardens. He said they matched your nature."

"Did he?"

"Have you always lived here?"

She was a long time in answering. We came into open moonlight and could see the cypress (*like the great wall of China,* I thought). A small wind was blowing now, so that the bamboo thickets were filled with a dim creaking. But there was no visible motion to the cypress and we were too far to hear any sound the wind might make there.

"All my life," she said.

"Why?" Because it had always seemed to me that the world was made large so that a man could go from place to place. "You are rich. You could travel in luxury over the whole world."

"Perhaps Waite would give me the money to travel." Her smile was slightly wistful, and very lovely. "Many people don't travel, Mr. Lane. Many of us are not adventurers or—" The smile faded from her face; she turned to look straight at me. "Did you really come here to learn who killed Waite's father and brother?"

"I came to visit Waite."

"But you are a detective?"

I told her the truth. "I was a deputy sheriff once, for six months. That's all."

"You didn't tell Waite that you could learn which one of us was the murderer?"

"I don't think I ever said that."

Far off I heard the barking of dogs. The girl said, "You could never have learned anyway. Because they weren't murdered. At least, the murderer isn't alive any more."

I could only stare at her. "It was Lloyd Bronson's horse that killed his father," she said. "Lloyd knew the horse was wild. He liked them that way. He should never have let his father ride it. Uncle Thane was not a good horseman."

"You mean Lloyd deliberately let his father—?"

"No. It was carelessness. At least, Lloyd blamed himself afterwards. He said he was responsible for his father's death. It became an obsession with him. He began to refer to himself as his father's murderer."

"And Lloyd?"

"I think he fell from the balcony—on purpose. At least—" She put her hand on my arm as Waite had done earlier that night. "It must have been that way. I have thought about it so much, for so long! It had to be that way!"

"You are frightened," I said.

"Only because Waite has talked the way he has, always saying that Uncle Thane and Lloyd were murdered. It—gets on your nerves."

But the truth was in her eyes. "You have been afraid a long time," I said. "All the years since your uncle was killed you have been afraid."

She looked around her at the garden. "I think I have been afraid all my life," she said.

The dogs had quit barking now. Janice made that little gesture with which Waite would discard one mood and adopt another —though with her it was not so completely successful. "You must think me awfully silly," she said. "And we must go back to the house now. Ulla will have supper ready."

The house was brightly lighted when we entered. Crystal candelabra hung from the high ceilings; they stirred faintly with the wind, so that the crystals, catching the light of the candles, broke it into fragments and flung it like yellow marbles against the walls, and over the ceilings and floors.

Janice sent a servant to call Waite. "But there is no need for us to wait," she said, and we went in to the supper table.

It was a huge mahogany table richly set with creamy linen, heavy silver, and cut glass—and yet the silver was not all the same pattern, nor the glasses; the table cover and the napkins did not match, nor all the dishes. It was as if whoever set the table had simply dipped into loaded drawers, taking out the first things that came to hand. But Janice did not seem to notice—and it was then I began to wonder who was the real mistress of the house.

We were waited on by a Negro man, but it was Ulla, the woman who had showed me to my room, who supervised the meal. Her face would appear at the door, watching us for a moment, and then be gone again.

Under the light of the candles Janice was a very charming and beautiful hostess. She asked questions about Cuba and about the West and I found that she had a good sense of humor, a quick light laugh that would have seemed impossible in the gardens only a few minutes before. Perhaps she did have, I thought, some of Waite's ability to shed one mood easily and pick up another. Even the tone of her beauty seemed to have changed with the candlelight. A faint rose flush lay just under the surface of her skin which was more sunburned than ladies usually cared to be those days.

"You say you were a deputy sheriff?"

"It was in New Mexico," I said. "There was a range war going on, with the sheriff sort of caught in the middle. After six months I decided I had strained my luck far enough, and gave it up."

"Cousin Carey is always feuding with somebody. He claims they are stealing his cattle and driving him bankrupt, and they claim he steals theirs. Why do cattlemen do that?"

"The nature of the beast," I said.

"What did you do when you quit being a deputy?"

"I tried gambling, until I ran into a gambler who was much better than I was."

"And then?"

"I was thinking of going back to newspaper work, but the war came along and I tried that instead."

"All your life you have wandered from job to job, from place to place?"

"Without being a vast success in any one of them," I said. "But it is a lot of fun."

"Waite talked a lot about you—"

I had forgotten Waite and looked with what must have been visible surprise at his empty chair. "Where is he?" I asked. "Isn't he coming to supper?"

"I never know what he's going to do." She leaned forward, her eyes on mine. "When you go into a new town, a new place where everyone is a stranger and where you don't know your way about among the streets, what is it like? How do you feel?"

"It's like tasting a new wine. You don't know whether you will like it or not. But—"

There was a large mirror on the wall behind Janice and in this I saw the shadowy movement before a man came forward into the light. He was about fifty, his hair gray and uncombed. His shirt was fastened at the throat, without a collar. An old alpaca coat stretched tight over broad-sloped shoulders, and he wore a beard that was obviously the result of laziness rather than vanity.

"Janice," he said.

"Come in," Uncle Ben. Mr. Lane, this is my uncle, Ben Stevens."

I stood up, and the old man looked at me out of red-veined eyes. "You the fellow that come out with Waite, ain't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, Waite's got hisself killed."

"IT WAS the dogs," Ben Stevens said. "I heard them yelping and carrying on, but I didn't know what they was up to." We were crossing the yard, the light of his lantern bright in the shadows, seeming to pale in the moonlight. "They must have been at it for some time. Finally I went down just to shut 'em up. And found Waite."

"You mean the dogs had killed him?" It didn't seem possible.

"They'd bit him more than once before, but I never thought— Maybe tonight he'd fell and hurt hisself. Some of those varmints got wolf blood in 'em; jump anything that's down."

We went past barns and there was the smell and sound of horses. Oaks closed out the moon and in the lanternlight our feet made jerky shadows. "Here," Ben Stevens said. "You can see the tracks, see how they fought." He stopped and touched the earth: his fingertips were dark in the lanternlight when he held them up. "Blood," he said.

We went on. Suddenly there was the snarling of dogs around us and I could see them at the edge of the light. Stevens cursed them and they faded back; eyes gleaming and vanishing from the light. Then we came out of the shadows and I saw a cabin, little more than a Negro shanty really, the steps sagging.

"I put him inside," Stevens said. We went in. The air was hot and close. A fire burned low on the grate. The lanternlight showed an unmade cot, a table with a half-filled tin plate and a cup, a chair, and on the floor a dirty quilt spread over what might have been a child's body, it seemed to me.

"I put that over him," Ben Stevens said. "Don't know just why, 'less it was I didn't want to look at him." He stopped and pulled back the quilt. "You can see where they got him on the hand and arm, and there on the leg, too. But it was the throat that killed him."

He replaced the blanket. I hadn't moved. I knew there was something I would have to do, but not yet. And Stevens was saying, "Here, Bud. You look like you can use some of this. Reckon I can, too." He held out a tin cup of rum.

"If he bothers you," Ben Stevens said, "we could go in the other room. The other room's my laboratory. Do my experimenting in there."

"I'm all right," I said. "How do you think it happened?"

"Maybe he played one joke too many on them dogs."

"What dogs? His own dogs wouldn't have done that."

"He didn't have none of his own."

"Then whose?"

"Mine, maybe. But there was already some commotion down there to attract 'em

I was eating my supper and heard 'em howling."

"You didn't hear Waite?"

"He wouldn't of hollered. If you knew Waite, you knew that. If he got mad at them dogs he'd have stayed there and fought 'em just out of spite."

"Yes," I said. A kind of numbness was still on me, the way it is after a bullet hits you and for a little while there is no pain, just the shock as though you had been leaning against one side of a door and something had struck the other side. "What kind of dogs are they? Catch dogs?"

"Same stock as some of them Carey uses, maybe. Only mine ain't been well trained."

We heard steps on the porch and turned to see Brud Cammett. He had changed his clothes since the ride from Tampa and now he wore a white satin shirt of the type Lord Byron wore to have his picture painted. He stood in the doorway, his face a little drawn, his nostrils flared, looking from the quilt spread on the floor to Stevens and me.

"He's—dead?"

"Yes."

"Ulla told me. She'd heard Uncle Ben at the house."

CAMMETT'S face had an almost gaunt look and some of the superb confidence which he customarily wore seemed to have left him. "How did it happen?"

"Dogs," Ben Stevens said. "Mine. Maybe some others too."

It was then I said, "Waite told me it was always like that. It always could have been an accident."

I went past him, through the door to the shadowed porch. I had been sweating and now the beads felt clammy on my forehead. The numbness was wearing off now. I kept remembering that Waite had been my friend, and I kept remembering the things he had told me.

But it was not my affair, even if Waite's death had been no accident. It was a family affair. It was a matter for the men and women of Dark Gardens to settle among them—or for the law, if any law came into this country. I had drifted into the affair, drawn only by something I did not understand. I could leave whenever I wanted.

And I knew I wasn't going to leave. Not yet.

I stood there on the dark porch and tried to explain that to myself. *It's like going on a brawl with a friend,* I thought, *and he gets fighting drunk and in trouble, and you can't leave him because you started on the party with him. You have to see it through.*

And I knew it was more than that. *Maybe it is the same reason I came here, even though I didn't know at the time what that reason was. Maybe I have been in love with Janice since the night Waite showed me her picture in a bar in Cuba.* And that I thought was impossible.

When I went back into the cabin Ben Stevens asked, "You feel all right?"

"I feel all right," I said, and took a long breath. "We'll have to get a doctor to look at Waite."

Stevens said, "Hell, it's too late for that."

"There's no real undertaker this side of Tampa," Brud said. "People do their own burying here, and there's a family cemetery here in the Gardens. I think Waite would prefer that."

"A doctor," I said, "to make sure of how Waite died."

They stared at me, and after a moment the same look was on both their faces, though Ben Stevens was more slow to understand. Finally he said, "So you are a detective. And I thought Waite was lying."

"I was Waite's friend," I said.

"Yes, he told us," Brud said. Some of the gauntness, the tension seemed to leave his face. "I rather liked that boy, in my own way. So I'm glad you thought of the doctor. I'll send one of the Negroes, but it will be morning before the doctor can get here."

He went out and Stevens said, "You want some more rum, Mister?" He was looking at me with more interest than he had showed before.

"No thanks." I asked, "Is there a sheriff in this county, anywhere within reach."

"Why, sure." He grinned and I saw he was missing two front teeth. "Carey Russell is the law. I don't know just when the election was or what you call the office. But Carey is the law."

"He'll have to be notified."

"He won't worry," Ben Stevens said, "if you wait until morning."

The dogs growled at me as I left the cabin, but none came near. I went back

through the moonlight to the big house where the dining-room table was still set, the candles still burning. But the house itself seemed empty.

As I hesitated Ulla came in. "Miss Janice is gone to her room. She told me to give you anything you want."

"Nothing," I said. "But there will be a doctor here early in the morning. I want to know when he comes."

I went up the spiral staircase. A breeze whimpered down the long hallway on the second floor where doors opened to right and left. But the only light was from the room assigned to me, and I thought of Janice lying in the dark now and of the fear I had seen in her eyes earlier that night.

You have been afraid a long time. All the years since your uncle was killed you have been afraid.

I think I have been afraid all my life.

I went to my room and out through the French windows to the observatory. The rotting chair sat before the broken bannister and I moved around it, so that I stood between it and the gap in the rail. Far below me the gardens lay dim in the moonlight. And beyond the gardens the black wall of cypress rose against the sky.

I sat down in the chair and my feet, outstretched, were over the edge of the balcony. Lloyd Bronson had probably been sitting in this chair a few minutes before his death. And Waite had left it here, trying to keep everything just as it had been, because he hoped in that way to have a better chance of learning who had killed his brother.

But he had never learned.

I don't know why I remembered, just then, the thing that Waite had said soon after I met him in Tampa. He had been getting out of the carriage in front of the hotel and he'd said, "I've fixed it so the killer may take a whack at you, Charlie, before he tries to finish me off." And then he'd laughed as he always did at those wild jokes of his.

I stood up to go back into my room, turned—and a figure was so close on me that instinctively I stepped backward. My foot hit the edge of the balcony. I stumbled, then, somehow, lunged forward, away from the edge, and I was standing very close to Janice, holding to her, breathing hard.

"You almost—fell!"

My heart was in the top of my chest and I had to swallow to get it down. I said rather foolishly, "You surprised me. I didn't hear you come out."

She freed herself and stepped back. She was wearing a white robe drawn together with a belt at the waist. Her dark hair hung loose about her throat and shoulders.

"I had to see you. I had to find out. Was Waite—was it an accident?"

"I don't know."

"Uncle Thane and Lloyd, and now Waite."

"It's carrying the accident theory a long way," I said. "Three men in the same family."

HER lips were dark in the moonlight, her eyes were dark. "I've got to know," she said. "We lived together in this house, the four of us. Now—" Her eyes moved so that she looked for a moment at the house, then away again. "Will you find out for me?"

"How can I?"

"If Waite was killed it would have been for the money. No one of them would have killed him without knowing where the money was. You can see if it is still there."

"Where?"

Her face was bent back to look into mine. "Don't you know?"

"How could I know?"

"Waite told us you did. He said he'd told you one night when you were drinking together in Cuba."

So that was it, I thought. That was the joke he'd played on me and his relatives. "He didn't tell me," I said. "I knew he was wealthy. I'd imagined the money was in a bank."

"There were no banks in this country when Waite's grandfather made his money, and he wouldn't have trusted them if there had been. He didn't trust anything but gold. He shipped cattle to Cuba and sold it for gold. Sometimes his ships were used as wreckers along the keys—some people called it piracy; I've heard my Uncle Thane laugh and call it that—after his father died. During the Civil War his ships smuggled goods in for the Confederacy, cattle into Cuba. But he always put his money into Spanish gold."

I remembered the Spanish doubloons that

White had carried in the money-belt and the way he had thrown them on the gambling tables.

"So there is a fortune in Spanish gold here somewhere," I said. "And I am supposed to know where. And no one else knows—except the person who killed Waite?"

"People may think that I do, because I lived here with Uncle Thane and Lloyd and Waite."

"Would your relatives think that, Brud and Carey Russell and your Uncle Ben Stevens?"

"I don't know." She turned away from me, looking over the gardens. "I can't be sure of anything. I can't be sure, and—I'm afraid."

I put my arm around her. It seemed the natural thing to do! for about three seconds it seemed natural and brotherly. And then I was aware of the smoothness of her flesh under the thin robe, I could smell her hair and feel the touch of it on my cheek and a small trembling ran through me and my arm tightened, turning her, pulling her against me. Her face was close under mine, and in it there was neither invitation nor repulse—just the fear which had been there all along.

"Miss Janice," the voice said.

Ulla stood in the shadows, in the doorway which led to the upper hall.

"All right," Janice said. She went quietly after the older woman. I went into my own room and closed the French windows. There was no lock on them. I blew out my lamp, undressed by moonlight, and went to bed.

I awoke with the feel of a hand on my shoulder. Ulla was standing over me. The room was bright with morning sunlight. "The doctor is out to Mr. Ben Stevens," Ulla said.

She wore the same dress she had worn the night before, a dark, shapeless thing that fastened close around her neck. *She's been up all night,* I thought, but there was no mark of sleepiness upon that copper-colored, ageless face. Was she mulatto, or Indian, or part Indian, I wondered.

"You were visiting Mr. Waite," she said. "You'll be leaving soon after he is buried."

"Not right away."

"How soon?"

"I don't know exactly. Why?"

"Miss Janice won't want strangers around Dark Gardens now."

"Did she tell you that?"

She didn't answer, but at the door she turned and looked back at me. "Won't any of them want strangers in Dark Gardens now."

That might be, I thought, dressing. And might not. It might depend on whether or not anyone had believed Waite's story about me knowing the location of his gold. It was a rather far-fetched story, but on the other hand, there was no way of knowing it to be false.

It occurred to me, then, that to kill for a hoard of Spanish doubloons was not necessarily the work of a relative. True, the relatives would inherit land and property. But the gold would go to whoever located and got away with it.

I found the doctor and Ben Stevens sitting on Stevens' front porch, having a cup of rum. The doctor was named Eaton, a little man, bald, with a thin, unhappy mustache. When we were introduced he said, "Glad to meet you, son. Sit down. A lovely morning, ain't it?"

"I'll get another cup," Steven said.

"No, thanks," I said. "It's a bit early in the morning."

"Start the day off right," Dr. Eaton said. "A mighty fine tonic, a little good rum."

"Have you made your examination yet?"

"Huh? Oh, he's dead all right. Must have been just about instantaneous."

"I meant, can you be sure what it was killed him?"

"Mr. Lane here is a detective," Ben Stevens said. There was a spark of humor in his red-veined eyes. "Must be a pretty good one too—learns in advance where to get his pay."

"Detective?" the doctor said.

"Waite always had the idea that old Thane and Lloyd was killed. He got Mr. Lane down here to find out who done it."

"I wondered why you sent a nigger after me in the middle of the night to come look at a dead man," the doctor said. Then to me. "Ben saw the dogs, didn't he?"

"Waite was already dead. I wanted to be sure that it was dogs which killed him."

"Well, son"—he took a pull at his rum—"to err is human, and I'm human, though

maybe my wife don't think so. But I'd say a bunch of catch dogs jumped Waite, and one of them got him by the throat."

I asked Stevens if dogs would have done that without being set on him. "He must have known your dogs," I said.

"He knew 'em all right, and they'd bit him more'n once." He pushed his fingers up through his dirty beard. They were big fingers with muscles lumped on the hand. "This is the first time they got him by the neck," he said.

I didn't want to, but I had to do it. I went into the cabin where the body still lay on the floor, the dirty quilt spread over it. I knelt and pulled back the quilt. It wasn't much

of an examination the doctor had made. The blood had not even been washed from Waite's face and throat. There was no money-belt around his waist.

When I stood up Stevens was standing in the doorway, looking at me. "Well?" he said.

"The dogs couldn't have taken the belt."

His eyes shifted away from me. "There wasn't much in it."

"All right." But as I started past he put out his hand and stopped me. "What are you aiming to do? You aiming to stay here?"

"For a while."

"Why? What good'll it do you to stay? What are you after?"

"He was my friend," I said.

But I knew, walking back toward the house that I had not told the full answer, for the bond of friendship between Waite and me had not been unusually close. Then what was it that held me here?

I didn't like to be puzzled about myself. My own emotions had always been relatively simple and elemental things. Usually when I did something I knew why.

I turned a corner, past flowering oleanders, and could see the house. Janice was standing on the porch with Carey Russell's foreman, Tom Smith. He was holding both her hands, standing close to her, his lean, dark face bent over hers. And seeing them I felt a shock of surprise that was sharper than it should have been.

He was talking to her. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but I could see the way he was looking at her, and I felt a sudden, reasonless anger. And then I had stopped and was saying half aloud to myself, "That's it, you fool! It's the girl!"

I stood there feeling surprised at myself, much younger than my years, almost embarrassed. For I had always liked to fancy myself as something of a rounder; most of the women I had known had been women like Cherry and they were fun to know but nothing to keep you from going on to other places and other women. But now, looking at Janice, I began to think I wasn't going to want to move on to other women, and that was a hard thing for me to realize about myself. *Damn it!* I thought. *I'm in love with her! Honestly!*

I went on, up the steps. Tom Smith had released Janice's hands and turned to watch me, silent again. He was wearing his gun, I noticed.

Carey Russell and Brud came out of the front door. Carey came first, his face redder than I had ever seen it. His eyes, normally gray, were almost colorless now with little, white fires in the center. He came straight at me and reached out and took hold of my coat with his left hand.

"All right," he said. "Where the hell is that money?"

I put the palm of my hand against the knuckle of his little finger—the one clutching my coat—and pushed, not too hard at first. He held on. Neither of us said anything just then. I was the taller, Carey the heavier. I think he was stronger than I was, but I had the whole force of my hand

against one of his fingers. Gradually it pushed back and his hand came off my coat.

"Now," I said. "What money?"

"You damn well know what money."

"The Spanish gold that Waite was supposed to have around somewhere."

"And did have!"

"I don't know. I never heard of it until last night, after Waite's death."

Brud Cammett laughed. He was standing off to one side, watching. He said, "I told you, Carey."

"Shut up!"

"You don't think Waite would have really told him?"

Carey swung around, breathing hard. His face was baffled and angry. He was like a bull fresh in the ring, pawing the ground, looking about for something to charge. I remember thinking that, and a moment later thinking that the really brave bulls don't do much pawing and pacing about before charging—and that the really brave bulls are not as dangerous as the others. The brave bulls charge straight and honestly, and what they kill is done in open attack.

"You can't be sure Waite didn't tell him," Carl Russell said.

"No," I said. "Not even the person who killed Waite can be completely sure of that."

I could hear Janice's quick, in-drawn breath. Smith was standing a half-step back of her, watching all of us, saying nothing. Brud Cammett said, "The doctor told you—?"

"Nothing. He never troubled to look closely." My gaze went from one to another of them. Waite had been their cousin and all of them had lived on his property, profited by his wealth. Yet there was no sign of grief or personal sorrow on a single face, not even Janice's. Fear, anger, a mild amusement—and watching all of us like some off-stage Greek chorus with nothing to say, Tom Smith.

Brud said, "I wonder, Carey, if you really believe Waite would have told him?"

"He could have," Carey turned to me. "Maybe you know where that money is, maybe you don't. But you're not leaving Dark Gardens until it's found. You understand? If you try to leave here, God help you."

"I was wanting to stay," I said. "Thank you for the invitation." I began to feel almost good then, better than at any time since passing through the green wall of cypress that locked the world out of Dark Gardens. I said to Janice, "You look very pretty this morning. That dress is Cuban, isn't it? And very becoming."

She smiled; it was a faint, weary thing at first; then there was a lift to her shoulders and a light in her eyes. "Thank you." She held out her arm. "We'll go in to breakfast."

I took her arm, and gave Silent Tom Smith my most charming smile. As we turned away I thought that he reminded me of Ulla, the way he could look at you with nothing showing in his eyes at all.

WAITE was buried that day at twilight. Most of the gardens were well tended, but here at the edge, near the trees, the grass grew ragged and there were no flowers. A small wind which we could not feel on the ground was trapped like an animal in the cypress above us, making a faint crying.

Dr. Eaton served as preacher, there being no preacher in that country, and the doctor had evidently spent the day preparing his sermon over Ben Stevens' rum barrel. Besides Waite's relatives, the only mourners were Tom Smith and I, and in the background Ulla and a half-dozen Negroes. It was one of these who began to sing, the old man who had waited on us at the table. His voice was high and thin as that of a woman and he sang without words that I could understand, without prearranged music.

It was the only genuine expression of human grief I heard that day.

The days that followed I spent chiefly with Janice. We walked in the gardens. We sat for hours on the shaded porch. We rode. Riding, she wore a man's clothes, trousers, a shirt open at the throat, a wide-brimmed hat. Women didn't dress like that very often in those days—yes, and damn few of them should dress like that now. We would ride along Indian Creek, a brown belt with a green border of bonnets and rushes and fish jumping in the shadows; or we would ride the short distance to Carey Russell's ranch—going by the town it was two miles or more, but scarcely half that across the open country. I went there several times and made a point of watching his catch dogs

work, trying to learn all I could about them. I visited Brud Cammett in his cottage and Uncle Ben Stevens in his cabin; I looked time and again at the place where Waite had been killed. But I learned very little, and what I remember now, so many years later, is the time spent with Janice; the hours in the garden with the moon tipping the cypress, the rides along Indian Creek.

But always when we went riding there would be one of Carey Russell's cowboys somewhere in the background. I would have forgotten about him, forgotten about everything but Janice, and glancing backward I would see the man rounding a clump of palmetto, rifle across his saddle.

Evidently Carey meant for me to remain at Dark Gardens until the gold was found —and no one seemed to make progress at finding it. Both Carey and Brud were searching, Janice also. Only Uncle Ben Stevens seemed to have no interest in the Spanish doubloons. "If I discover how to get gold out of sea water," he told me, "I'll have more gold'n I know what to do with. If I don't—" He shrugged. "Whoever finds it will keep my rum barrel full."

And then one morning I awoke to find Ulla standing over me, looking down at me. I had no idea how long she had been there. She was standing perfectly motionless. "Go away," she said. "You go away from here, today."

"What's happened?"

"You go away. Something will happen to you if you stay."

But the day slipped by like the ones before it. There was supper in the big dining room where the candlelight fluttered like butterflies on walls and ceiling, and after supper Janice and I walked in the gardens.

It was the hottest night of the spring. The heat lay still and quiet upon the gardens. The moon was not yet up so that the flowers were pale, shapeless masses. On the pools the huge lilypads were invisible, but when a fish jumped there would be a dim ripple on the water and this would vanish where a lilypad began.

WE WALKED for a long time that night without talking. The air was so still the odors did not mix, but lay in deep pools about their own flowers, the oleander and cape jasmine, honeysuckle and azalea, magnolia and lily. And then, a whippoorwill began his lonely crying.

"He was singing the night that Waite was killed," Janice said.

"I remember." Probably we had been talking about it at the very moment.

"These last few days have been so strange. Carey rushing into the house to search some place he's just thought of, then out again. Brud hunting, but never saying anything about it, except to laugh, never seeming in a hurry. 'The Easter Egg hunt,' he called it. I've been searching too—and afraid of what I may find."

"Afraid?"

"What would happen if I found it? It's belonged to Uncle Thane and to Lloyd and to Waite. And they are all dead."

"You could split it into quarters, an equal share for each of you."

She turned to look at me. "Why? Do you think Brud or Carey would do that?"

I thought about them. "No. I don't believe they would."

"What is going to happen, Charles?"

"I don't know. I've almost ceased to think about it." She stood very close to me in the dark. "I have been living in the house with you, and more aware of that than anything else. More aware of it every day."

"It must have been strange to you—it would be strange in the outside world, you staying on here, without Waite."

No one had mentioned it before. I had expected Brud Cammett or Carey to say something, but they hadn't. They hadn't seemed to notice that I was alone in the house with Janice, or not to care if they noticed.

We moved on along the dark walk, and I, who had always thought I was pretty good with women, found I couldn't possibly think of the right thing to say. When my hand found hers it was almost accidental. Then I stopped and turned her to face me, and kissed her for the first time.

She stepped back from me. "Give me time," she said in a half whisper. "Give me time to think." Then she was gone and I stood there, still feeling the dampness of her mouth on my lips.

The whippoorwill quit singing, breaking off on the second note as though something had frightened him. I waited, smoking a

cigar. The odor of it was good and virile among all those flowers, and it gave me a measure for time.

The night stayed quiet. The cigar finished, I went in the house and up the spiral staircase to the second floor. I knew now which was Janice's room, but no light showed beneath the door and there was no sound. In my own room a lamp burned dimly, the way it was left for me each night. On the observatory it was so dark I could scarcely see the bannister with the break in it and the chair. I sat down in the chair and waited.

Over the wall of cypress, the world's rim, the warped moon came up, and I was saying half aloud lines which I had learned a long time ago and forgotten and remembered now without volition:

And like a dying lady, lean and pale,
Who totters forth, wrapped in a gauzy veil,
Out of her chamber, led by the insane
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain,
The moon rose up in the murky east,
A white and shapeless mass.

Behind me the door opened. I would not have heard it if I had not been waiting, listening. There was no other sound and I did not turn but just sat there and my mouth felt dry and my lips were dry and my hands shook a little on the arms of the chair.

I heard the step, soft as a bird's step it seemed. "Janice," I said, and turned, looking up to see her.

It was Ulla. She stood perhaps a yard behind me, both hands raised over her head, the iron poker from the great fireplace downstairs a shadow extending upward from her hands. For one long second we looked at one another; then she slashed downward with the iron.

Instinctively I threw up one arm even as I rolled, the chair turning over, spilling me on the porch. My legs were over the edge of the balcony; they kicked against the broken rail, and rolling I saw the moon, then the empty darkness. I flung out an arm and caught the bannister. Somehow I was on my knees and Ulla was coming toward me, the weapon raised again.

I reached for the overturned chair—and got it only with my left hand. The right arm bent curiously downward between elbow and wrist. With one hand I lifted the chair and threw it.

She staggered backward under the impact. The iron poker made a dull clang on the balcony, the sound of the chair falling mingled with it. The woman spun away and was gone through the open door.

She raced down the hallway with me after her. Janice's door was open and I could see her against the lamplight, staring into the dark hall. "Charles!" she called. "Charles!" We were going down the spiral staircase, down which Ulla seemed to fly without sound, though the loud thudding of my shoes shook the darkness. Then we were outside the house and she had disappeared into the night.

I did not stop. Perhaps I had heard her run in that direction; perhaps I know where to look—I had been there several days now. I remembered asking Waite, "Does he live alone? Is he married?" And Waite saying, "He isn't married." The cottage was heavy with wisteria. Light showed dull at the windows. I hit the door one time with my left fist and pushed it open and went in.

Brud Cammett was standing there, facing the door. The lamp was on the table behind him. In the far corner the woman huddled, her lips parted, her eyes like those of a trapped animal watching the dog come toward it.

"This is my cottage," Brud Cammet said.

"She tried to murder me."

"Yes," he said. "I was afraid she might." His gaze went for a moment to my arm. "You're hurt."

I looked down at it as though it might belong to someone else. It was beginning to hurt but the pain seemed to have no center; it ran impartially through my body. I could hear my own breathing. "You sent her to kill me," I said.

"No." His voice was calm. His face was calm with sadness in it. "She has been with us all her life. She was my nurse, and Janice's. She has raised Janice, been her mother almost. She thinks you have come here to cause us, to cause Janice, trouble."

"Janice? Trouble?"

From the corner, unmoving, the woman watched me. *She will cling to whatever is hers,* I thought. *A possession, an idea. What she has tried once she will try again, will*

keep trying, by instinct, not without hope but without regard for hope.

"She is not altogether normal," Brud Cammett said. "I will try to explain to her."

I went back across the gardens. The pain came out from my arm in waves. It flowed and bubbled through me. I went into the house and up the stair and Janice was standing in the doorway, the light falling out past her, as though she had never moved.

"Charles!"

"Ulla tried to kill me. I was to go over the edge of the observatory, the way Lloyd did."

She swayed, holding to the door frame. I said, "I am going to Tampa. Will you go with me?"

She did not answer and I said, "The proof is there, I think. I should have seen it a long time ago."

"But what about Carey? What if he—?"

"I'll have to chance that. They would kill me if I stayed here."

For the first time she noticed my arm. She did not ask questions or make any comment but drew me into her room and ripping a sheet from the bed made a bandage and sling. The sweat was thick and cold on my forehead when she finished. She said, "Could you stand the ride to Tampa with that arm, Charles?"

"I'll have to."

"Then go out of the room while I change clothes."

In my room the lamp still burned on the table. With one hand I unfastened the straps on my bag, got out the gun and gunbelt which I had worn as a deputy sheriff; but the holster was hung to ride on my right thigh so that with my left hand I could scarcely reach it. So I took the gun out of the holster and put it inside the sling about my right arm. Even through the bandage the metal felt cold and good to my arm.

Janice was standing in her doorway again. We went down the stairs and in the kitchen she lighted a lantern. We went out the back; the lantern bright in the shadows, paling in the moonlight, and for a moment it was again the night I had come this way with Ben Stevens and he was saying, "Some of these varmits got wolf blood in 'em. They'll jump anything that's down."

Janice opened the barn doors. There was the hot, dry smell of hay and the odor of horses and horseblankets and the sound of horses stirring. "I'll saddle them," Janice said.

Behind us the man said, "No. Don't do it, Miss Janice."

It was Tom Smith. He stood at the edge of the circle of light. The light touched on the smooth worn butt of the gun at his thigh. His face was in the shadows. "Mr. Lane can't leave," he said.

"No?" I said.

"The boss has his reasons."

"I'm going to the doctor," I said, and touched the bandaged arm with my left hand.

"We'll send for the doctor." His right shoulder sloped forward; the fingers of his right hand were bent and near the gun butt. He knew I was going to make a play, but he didn't know how.

I adjusted the bandaged arm again, my hands carefully in the light. "That Indian woman tried to kill me," I said, and put my left hand inside the bandage as if still trying to make the arm comfortable. My hand closed on the gun, pushed it until the muzzle showed alongside my elbow, pointing straight at Smith.

I said, "Walk around behind him, Janice, and take his gun."

He never moved, but as she lifted the gun from his holster, he asked, "You are going with him, Miss Janice?"

"I'm going with him."

There was nothing else. She saddled the horses, led them forward. "Turn all the others out," I said. "We'll need as much start as we can get."

A few minutes later she was back. She mounted, then covered Smith with his own gun while I climbed into the saddle. She said, "Good-bye, Tom Smith."

"Good-bye." He looked at me. The lantern sat on the ground and his face was in the shadows above it. "Good luck," he said. "You'll need it."

So we rode out of Dark Gardens and through the great wall of cypress. We rode faster than it was safe to go at first, as though this first breaking away, this getting out of the gardens and beyond the cypress were more important than all the long stretch ahead. But we slowed the pace soon,

both for our own sakes, and for the horses. We would lope them for awhile, slow to a walk, then we'd walk awhile, leading them. Neither the riding nor the walking helped my arm, and the whole thing is a trip I do not like to remember. I think I was out of my head part of that time because I have vague memories of babbling to Janice about Cherry and of saying time and again that the things at Dark Gardens could never be solved there and that I had to know, we both had to know, because there could never be any happiness and understanding between us until we did.

IN THE late afternoon we reached Fort Brooke. "A doctor," Janice said.

"Later. Not now."

It was gloomy in the big room with the bar along one side. Behind the bar stood the huge man whom I had last seen kneeling beside Cherry's bed. No one else was there.

He watched us as we entered, dust covered, staggering a little from weariness. He looked from me to Janice and back to me, his hands out of sight beneath the bar. He said, "You don't bring women in here."

"Have you ever learned who killed Cherry?"

He leaned a little forward. "You know? Do you know?"

"I think I do. You've got a girl here, not quite as tall as this lady, with very blond hair that doesn't look natural. Her skin and eyes are too dark. Maybe she's Cuban, or Spanish, with dyed hair. She wasn't here two years ago."

"That would be Edda." He began to breathe hard. "She owns the place now. You mean she—?"

"No. I don't think so. But she may know. Is she here?"

"I'll get her." He came from behind the bar. He did not hurry. There was something slow and ponderous about him, like some awkward machine that once started could not be stopped. "You wait," he said.

The girl was with him when he returned, the same girl who had been here the night when Waite and Brud Cammett and I had come, who had gone to tell Cherry I wanted to see her. She was dressed for the evening, her face heavy with rouge, and there was a diamond bracelet on her wrist. For just a moment fear showed in her eyes; she glanced back at the bartender who was between her and the door. Then she shrugged and came forward.

"Well?" she said.

"Do you remember me?"

"You came to see Cherry one night."

"You remember the man who was with me?"

"The pretty one? How could a girl forget him?"

"You went out to dance with him and a little later there were some shots from outside. Were you with him all that time? Were you with him when the shooting happened?"

"Sure."

I looked at the bartender. "She's lying," I said.

He reached for her and she tried to duck away. But his hand closed on her shoulder, and her face showed first fear, then pain. "Wait! Let go of me! I'll tell you!"

"You weren't with him."

"He left me right after we went in the dance-hall. I never saw him again. I swear I didn't!"

That was what I had been trying to remember for so long, knowing there was something I should remember, and not able to bring it clear. Brud had left with a girl, and when I saw him again, outside the building, there had been a girl with him. But not the same girl. One he had picked up in the confusion after the shots.

I said, "How did he get in to Cherry? That was later; it had to be later."

The bartender must have been hurting her shoulder because she screamed. I asked, "How much did he pay you?"

"It was in gold! A lot of gold! But he said he was a friend of hers! I thought he was! I—"

She screamed again. I think perhaps the man would have killed her then, but there was another voice in the room. Brud Cammett said, "I rode in with Carey. He's looking in Tampa for you. I thought you might be here."

His clothes were dusty, his face dusty and sweat-splotched. Yet he was still more handsome than any man has a right to be. He stood there with one hand in his coat pocket. His eyes were very blue.

So he had found the money, I thought,

before ever he and Waite came to Tampa to meet me. And the dance here had been too good to miss; a shot through the window, the blame on the bum I had thrown out a few minutes before. No one would ever have doubted that shooting at me the man had missed and hit Waite standing beside me. How much Cherry had seen I don't know even now; perhaps Cammett himself never knew, never tried to be sure. But he had known she was honest in her own fashion, known she could not be bought to sanction murder. And because of that she had to die.

"I wanted to be sure you knew the truth," Brud was saying. "Because I've always loved Dark Gardens. I didn't want to leave there unless I had to."

"Even with the ghosts haunting it?" I said. "Or didn't the ghosts bother you?"

"The ghosts didn't bother me. It was Uncle Thane and Lloyd and Waite who would have been troubled. Because the gardens should have belonged to me. I was the only one who cared for them."

The bartender was staring at Cammett, saying, "Is he the man? Is he? Is he?"

"So you've lost the gardens forever."

"Yes, though now I have the money in my saddle-bags, and I'll be taking it away with me, when I always wanted it for the Gardens." I think his smile was more wistful than bitter. "It requires money to keep and develop those gardens. I had been stealing family silver to buy new plants when Uncle Thane caught me. He had a violent temper, remember Janice? Then Lloyd kept worrying that he had caused his father's death; he kept trying to be sure, one way or the other, and he began to get close to the truth. After that, with only Waite left, it seemed natural to go ahead."

"Is he?" the bartender said. "Is he?"

"What's he talking about?"

"Cherry. He wants to know if you are the man who killed her."

"She is the only one I really regret," Brud Cammett said. "She was very pretty, and it isn't easy to destroy beauty."

The bartender said, "You killed her." He began to move toward Cammett, a blackjack in his hand, his eyes fastened on the other man. His lips kept working but no other sound came from them.

"Keep back," Brud Cammett said. He took his hand from his pocket and there was a pistol in it. "Good-bye, Janice."

The bartender was still moving. "Stop!" Cammett said. I don't think the man heard him; I don't think he could hear anything except the soundless words his own lips were saying. He began to lift the blackjack.

Brud Cammett fired. It was pointblank and the man swayed, shuddered a little as though he were cold, and kept going. Cammett fired the second time. He had gone backward now until he was against the wall. The bartender swung the blackjack and in the rumbling echoes of the second shot the sound of it was not audible. He struck a second time, holding Cammett erect now with his left hand. Then they went down together.

I led Janice past them, trying to block her view. Brud Cammett wasn't handsome any more. We went out into the dark of early night and Brud's horse was standing there beside the ones we had ridden. "We can go to the doctor now," I said.

We rode slowly. The pain in my arm was old and numb. "Ulla must have known," Janice said. "And she always loved him. She was only a few years older than he and she had looked after him as a child. What he did could make no difference in the way she loved him. She was only afraid you would find out what he had done."

We found a doctor. He was very serious as he looked at my arm. "I'll have to give you chloroform to set that," he said.

"Wait!" I said. I looked at Janice.

"Go ahead," she said. "I will be here when you wake up. It doesn't matter how long it takes. I'll be here."

Menace Is All About in the Wild; but One Fear Above All Others Haunted the Mother Lynx

Law Of The Cats

By KENNETH GILBERT

THE rising sun touched the snowy peaks with white-gold light, but down here in the depths of the saskatoon thicket it was still gloomy and the air had a bitter tang. Old Chela, the gray lynx, uncoiled herself from the bed of dead leaves and winter-browned grass into which her color blended so perfectly that she could not have been seen by human eyes at a distance of ten feet, and stood up on long legs, spreading and contracting her big pads, each armed with claws that were curved like a Turk's dagger. She stared around, conscious of the fear that seemed to go hand-in-hand with motherhood. Her thick-furred, tasselated ears were tipped forward to catch the slightest sound of threatened danger, and her topaz-jade eyes were round and unwinking. But there appeared to be no menace near at the moment, and she bent her head to lick the new-born kitten sprawled on weak, helpless legs in the nest which she had dug in the heart of the thicket the night before, when she knew her time was near.

Usually she had two kittens, but this time there was only one, and he might be her last, for age had crept upon her. Yet it seemed to her that the blind little ball of soft fur was the most beautiful baby she had ever mothered; and because he was doubly precious, The Fear became a real and poignant thing. Once more she peered around, listening. After travail she was des-

perately thirsty, but she would not leave the kitten unguarded for a moment.

The climbing sun sent tentative shafts of light into the thicket, and Chela yawned hungrily. The spring world was hushed at the moment, for the dawn was still too chill for even the bird songs which at this season welcomed the new day. She bent her head again, purring in her throat; then carefully picked the kitten up by the nape of the neck and moved away from the place. She made no sound, and every move seemed studied. By-and-by she came out of the covert and paused at a tiny pool where a melting drift had settled into a depression. Putting down the kitten she drank, but stopping now and then to look around and listen. Once she flinched, caught up the kitten and crouched as though to run as her observing eye caught a shadow against the brightened sky. But the maker of the shadow was only a bald eagle winging across the valley from one ledge to another, likewise intent on breakfast. Perhaps he saw the mother lynx, for his clear-gold eyes were like telescopes; but if he did so, he did not stop. Even an eagle was too smart to incur the wrath of a lynx with a new-born kitten.

Yet the incident seemed to stir her uneasiness again, reminding her of The Fear. She picked up the kitten and moved off silently again, a ghostly creature nearly three feet long, still in her thick winter fur, light gray except her head, which was darker with black bars on the wide fur ruff at either side. Her absurd stub-tail was not more than four inches long, and twitched with every movement of her lithe body. Save that his coat was more spotted, the tiny kitten was a replica of herself. He made no sound as she carried him, but when she stopped again and rested him, he mewed plaintively in hunger.

At once Chela lay down, licking him solicitously and purring encouragement. When he was satisfied at last, he lay there in profound sleep, and Chela was reminded again that she was ravenously hungry. At that moment her sharp ears caught a tell-tale rustle in a clump of dead weeds perhaps forty feet away.

Instantly she flattened, her furry body seeming to spread out on the ground, and even her dark-tipped ears sank. Only her nose twitched as she sought to sample the air currents which were almost still. Once more The Fear clutched her; yet the moment passed. What her nose told her was that food was nearby, and she began her stalk of the grass clump, flowing along the ground in a liquid fashion that scarcely disturbed a leaf. When she was within ten feet of the clump, she sprang.

There was a frantic cry, instantly choked off, and then Chela was bending over a small snowshoe rabbit still kicking convulsively. There was no compassion in her yellow-green eyes; she killed only that she might live, and that her baby might likewise survive. Having fed, she would kill no more until hunger drove her to it. She finished off the rabbit quickly and returned to the kitten, picking him up and melting into the woods in a manner of haste, for the death-cry might have been heard by other ears, and The Fear still haunted her. That night she denned up in a cave near the foot of a rock-slide, where she could keep her baby warm and where she could spend sleepless hours guarding the narrow entrance. The following day she moved him again, as though determined not to remain long enough in one spot for her presence to become generally known.

DAYS passed, the spring sun swung farther north, and the world grew more pleasant and astir with life. The kitten's eyes opened, and although his cloudy-blue orbs were as yet unlike his mother's, he became aware of the new world about him. He had the same huge feet characteristic of the lynx clan, and his legs grew strong so that he began to wander about his mother as she rested, his button-like nose questing the mystery of many strange odors. At the end of four weeks he had his first taste of meat.

It was a big meadow-mouse, or vole, which she laid gravely in front of him. At scent of the strange creature, the kitten, fur fluffed out in alarm, crouched and spat threateningly, needle-like fangs showing in his pink mouth. Chela dabbed at the mouse with her paw, to show the kitten that the thing was harmless. Suddenly he sprang, with an infantile yowl, mauling the mouse fiercely. For a long time he lay there, prey under his soft paws, and whenever Chela came near, he flattened his ears and growled warning. She looked on with approval,

preening her own fur, and washing her chops daintily after the manner of any ordinary house-cat. By and by she took the mouse away from him and disposed of it herself.

Thereafter his training for the life to which he was destined, went on daily. Chela taught him to hunt, the art of the stalk. One day, as they were lying in a thicket at the edge of a glade dappled with the sunlight of early summer, the kitten went hunting on his own accord. His nose led to a clump of dead twigs at the end of a windfall. He crouched a few inches away, for his instinct told him that he was close to living game. As he lay there, fearful of what to do, his mother came up silently and stood over him.

Suddenly she sprang on the clump of twigs, her great paws spatting the ground, as a half dozen wood-mice darted from the place. Accurately she struck them down, then turned and walked away. Encouraged, the kitten leaped forward, trying to do as she had done. When she came back a few moments later, he stood in the midst of his "kill," and warned her away.

Yet all the while, as his teaching went on, old Chela never relaxed her vigilance, never forgot The Fear. Perhaps she tried to impart some of her misgivings to the kitten, who was now half the size of an ordinary house-cat, but apparently he could not understand why she commanded him to moveless silence so often, while she surveyed the nearby coverts. Instinct told him to be wary, although the reason for it was never plain. He was six weeks old when he came face to face with death for the first time.

The mother was drowsing briefly on a little knoll covered by brush, from which vantage-point she could be on guard against the approach of danger from any direction. The kitten, full-fed on a portion of a mountain-beaver which she killed an hour before and shared with him, had slept and was now wide awake again, resolved to do some hunting on his own account. The thing that fascinated him at the moment was a gorgeous yellow-and-brown butterfly which fluttered temptingly past and alighted on a sun-kissed log a few feet away. At once the kitten crouched and began the stalk which his mother had so painstakingly taught him. But just at the instant when he was about to spring, the butterfly took off on its dipping flight and came to rest on another log much farther away.

Yet the kitten was determined now. Possibly he had visions of motherly approval when he returned to her with this beautiful trophy which he would strike down with his own skill. Inch by inch he moved forward, scarcely breathing, hoping to get near enough for the final rush. But just as he was gathering himself, the butterfly took flight again.

It was too much. In an instant the kitten had closed the gap, and stood on the tips of his hind paws, soft forefeet dabbing like lightning at the darting, twisting, fairy-like creature as it sought to escape. So intent on the "kill" was the kitten that he was unaware of the cold eyes regarding him from a thicket ten feet away. What happened the next second made the kitten forget butterfly and the thrill of the chase in a manner so startling that he literally turned a back somersault.

For, almost under his nose, the ground seemed to explode with a thunderous roar. An old spruce grouse, sunning himself there, had been watching the approach of the baby lynx with growing misgiving. As the kitten danced nearer, the big partridge took off with explosive abruptness, wings beating the air deafeningly. The kitten, after that flip-flop, arched its back and spat. Just then it found itself confronted by a creature the like of which it had never seen before.

Unhappily for the kitten, a wolverine, or Injun-devil, had been stalking the grouse at the instant of its take-off. The wolverine was hungry as usual and, being not too particular what sort of food passed between its powerful jaws, was content to compromise with the baby lynx, particularly when the shrewd killer fully understood that the kitten was responsible for the grouse's alarm. Without hesitation it moved toward the kitten, which appeared paralyzed with fear. But before it could strike, and a single snap of its jaws would have crushed the baby lynx, something gray flashed through the air with an appalling scream, landing squarely on the wolverine's back.

Terrible claws raked his tough hide, sharp fangs sang into his muscular neck. Swerving, he literally turned with his skin as he flashed upward at the fluffy body of the

mother lynx. But she ripped him with hind feet as she sprang clear; then, a few feet away, she crouched for another leap.

But the wolverine, redoubtable battler though he was, had no stomach for coming to grips with a she-lynx. With a squall of rage and pain he turned and leaped for the covert, and the mother lynx, well aware of the power of her adversary, was glad to let him go after that brief punishment.

The kitten ran to her with a yowl of relief, but she punished him with a blow of her padded left forefoot which sent him sprawling. Then, as though contrite at her burst of anger, she moved to him quickly and began exploring him for possible wounds. But a moment later she was staring around the clearing, as though fearful that the turmoil had drawn other enemies. The wolverine was deadly enough, and yet he did not represent The Fear. With a puttering sound deep in her throat, she picked up the kitten unceremoniously and went swiftly away from the place. Nor did she put him down again until she had traveled nearly a half mile.

FOR some reason, old Chela seemed more nervous than she had for many days. The lynx pair had been steadily working into higher country since leaving the place where the baby had been born. Here the hills were more mountainous, the slopes more rocky. There were not so many dense thickets. Yet there was an abundance of game. Chela showed him how to stalk a marmot, a waddling creature with a stub tail, which sat on a flat rock and whistled scorn until the mother lynx approached him unseen from behind another rock. Ground squirrels made them many a meal, and nests of deer mice, queer little beasts which hopped here and there instead of running, were found. Yet all the while, as the kitten grew stronger and more able to fend for himself, Chela's anxiety increased.

They came face to face once with a bull elk, approaching him by accident upwind. But he caught their scent and rose up, bellowing anger, and mother lynx and baby fled in haste. Again, they discovered a cougar feeding on a deer he had slain. But Chela signalled alarm to the kitten, and they turned and vanished before the tawny cat, more than twice the size of Chela herself, learned of their presence. Yet the kitten somehow came to know that of all these strangers he met, they did not represent The Fear which his mother was gradually imparting to him. The kitten might have guessed that he understood what she meant, the day that he encountered the wolf.

She had left him alone, while she set out to round up a chickaree squirrel which had recklessly descended a tree to garner a meal of mushrooms. The kitten, a little impressed by the warning his mother had given him, waited just off the twisting path which his nostrils told him was a game trail. Suddenly he flattened himself in the grass, as his mother had taught him to do, as his sensitive ears caught the soft pulsations of earth which he knew were caused by the pads of some approaching animal. So confident was the kitten in his ability to conceal himself, that he did not stir, but waited until the newcomer, moving down the game-trail from the heights, would pass him. What the kitten did not know was that a wolf—and this was a lanky gray beast—has perhaps the keenest nostrils of all wild creatures. Just as the gray killer swung past, a vagrant air-current betrayed the hiding-place of the kitten. The wolf, ridden by hunger, instantly read the situation. He had a dog-like hatred of all cats; he knew this was a small one. If his attack precipitated a battle with its mother, that was something he was willing to accept. All this appeared to flash through his mind before his eyes could even make out the kitten hiding in the grass. Without changing pace he half-turned and leaped.

But the kitten himself had the heritage of a long line of ancestors who have survived because their muscles are always like coiled springs. The young lynx's reaction was just as abrupt. As the wolf leaped for him, he also sprang—away from the killer. The wolf's paws struck the spot where the kitten had been, but the place was empty. Then, out of the corner of one eye, the wolf saw something gray and small flashing up the bark of a nearby spruce. Before he could reach it, the kitten was well out of reach.

The wolf stared at him with green-eyed hatred for a moment; then turned and went loping off down the trail. Yet even when Chela returned, she could not coax the kitten down. She settled the matter at last by

climbing after him, and removing him in squalling protest. Nor did she put him down until she had carried him well into the deep woods.

Caution was being driven into the kitten. He understood that death lurked in the deep woods which seemed so friendly and full of interesting things. Yet Chela was not satisfied that he had safely passed the test of peril. Back in her mother's brain still lurked that full awareness of The Fear.

AS SUMMER advanced, they moved higher into the hills, for the game seemed more plentiful here. The kitten was now the size of a house-cat. Likewise he had gained confidence. By his very manner he made it plain that he was full of wisdom and resourcefulness. His boldness appeared to deepen her anxiety. He had yet to learn The Law and The Fear as she knew them. He was continually wandering away, and although she punished him, the lessons did not seem to take hold. So it was that dusk when they came to the gorge and heard the brawling stream far below, and Chela indicated by her actions that they must cross it in some fashion, perhaps by going upward until the river became a mere trickle seeping from under snow-banks.

The moon came up, full and yellow, as they moved like shadows along the rim. Once Chela stopped and listened intently at some faint sound she had heard. But the kitten gave it no heed. He was aware only of the murmur of the river below, or sometimes the slight rustling of small animals in the brush as the lynx pair moved along. Yet at the same time the kitten sensed that his mother was far more uneasy than usual. She kept close to him, and frequently she stopped to lift her head and sniff as a puff of night wind brought hidden messages. This puzzled the youngster, but not for long. Then something happened, the like of which the kitten could never remember.

She had listened again and apparently heard something she understood. The kitten likewise heard it, but without understanding—a faint sobbing sound which came remotely and which rose and fell. But the effect on Chela was electric.

She spat fear and hatred, and her eyes blazed. A little alarmed at her, the kitten backed off; but she turned on him abruptly, nipped him so sharply that he squalled in pain. She held him to earth, growling, and never had he been more terrified. Then she suddenly released him. Yet the command she had given him could not be mistaken. He was to remain here, hidden, while she went to explore a situation which had suddenly disturbed her. He crouched obediently, and saw her vanish into the brush.

TIME passed and she did not return. The kitten grew impatient at last and lifted his head to look around. The woods were filled with moonlight now, and nothing moved within the range of his vision. From nearby came a light, scratching sound, which his newly-acquired woodcraft told him was a belated squirrel opening a fir cone and nibbling off the nut-like tips. The kitten's curiosity was stirred. Perhaps he could stalk and kill the squirrel while his mother was away. There was nothing hereabout of which to be afraid. That, to a beholder, could have been the only explanation of why he ignored her instruction to remain quiet and still. He stood up and, with body flowing along close to ground, began moving in the direction of the sound. But he did not go more than ten feet before he flattened once more, this time in mortal terror. It could only seem that instinct told him that he stood at last in the presence of The Fear itself!

What he saw waiting for him just at the edge of the moonlit glade was another lynx, one even bigger than Chela herself. Probably the kitten had always imagined that there were no other lynxes in the world, or else none as large as his mother. Yet this one was a giant; a great, gray creature with flattened ears and fur brushed smartly back from his chops, displaying fangs bared in an evil snarl. His big paws were stretched ahead, each with scimitar-like claws extended in anticipation. He was an exact counterpart of the kitten, only there was no fear in his manner, only intent to murder. The kitten sensed the unfriendliness, but seemed incapable of movement. There could be no escape in mere flight. The young animal understood that here was a situation for which no experience or teaching had prepared him. There was nothing for him to do save one thing—and he did it. He squalled piteously. And the effect of that

infantile cry was to unleash the fury of all predatory beasts, the savagery of the wilds that has persisted since the first "kill" was made.

He saw his gray mother, launched in an arrowy leap straight for the stranger's throat; saw the latter swerve to meet the charge, rolling over on his back, cat-fashion, forefeet and hindfeet working like buzz-saws. But old Chela knew all the tricks of infighting and, moreover, she was driven by an urge which is not surpassed by any other on this earth—the force of mother-love. Not only was she willing to give battle, she forced it. She was ready to die in defense of her young. As the two battlers sprang apart to come to grips once more, the beautiful coat of the bigger cat was stained by cruel slashes.

Nor had Chela escaped undamaged. Her flank was ripped, yet if she felt pain she ignored it. Never had the kitten seen her in such a moment of demoniac fury. As the big stranger watched her warily, she feinted to one side and then sprang straight for his throat.

Yet he was quick to avoid the thrust, and parried with a paw which stroked her shoulder like a handfull of knives. Her wailing snarl chimed into his terrifying paean of hatred. And, perhaps because he had expected that the last wound he had given her would be sufficient, this time he was a little too slow in meeting her charge. Perhaps, too, he would have been willing then to abandon the fight and withdraw to lick his wounds in sullen peace; but she would have none of it. This time her fangs met in his throat, and she threw her entire weight and strength into one last effort.

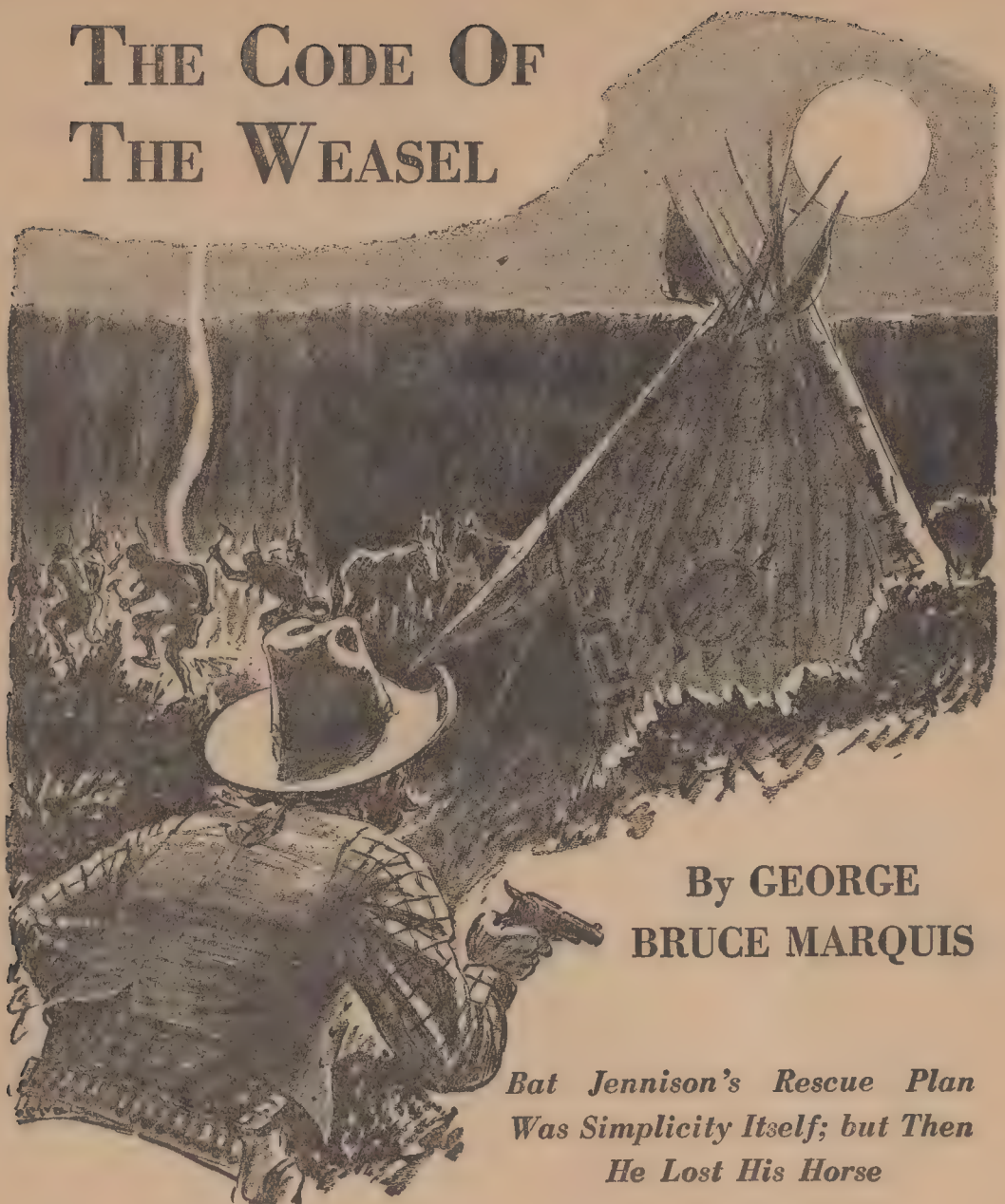
With a dog-like shake of her head she literally tore herself loose from him. Despite his size, he went rolling over and over as he came free. Despite his cat-like agility he could not regain his feet after that fearful impetus she had given him. The slope from the glade to the rim of the canyon was sharp and abruptly steep. Still clawing the air, he vanished. One moment the kitten saw him; the next moment the glade was still save for the distant murmur of the river at the bottom of the gorge far below.

Tongue lolling and breathing heavily, old Chela lay there on the grass. The kitten would have liked mightily to go near her, perhaps to comfort her, but he acted as though he understood this was no moment when she would welcome his babyish advances. He sat there on haunches, watching her as though with a sort of owlish expression, his round eyes mirroring perplexity. Yet there was no longer terror in them; even the kitten appeared to understand that The Fear was gone.

For a long time they remained there in silence, the kitten watching while she licked her wounds, which were many and grievous. By and by she got to her feet, shakily. The moon had swung up to the zenith now, until it bathed the glade in white light. At last she came over to the kitten and nuzzled him.

Perhaps now he understood the law of the cats—that nature, in her determination to keep down predators on this planet, has decreed that the young shall be murdered by their sire when chance offers. Some day the kitten would understand this, if he did not understand it now; he might well remember that he had narrowly escaped death at the mood of his own father. Yet Chela, followed by the kitten who would probably be her last-born, seemed to indicate to him that The Fear was gone forever, as they moved off into the cool summer woods.

The Code Of The Weasel



By GEORGE BRUCE MARQUIS

Bat Jennison's Rescue Plan Was Simplicity Itself; but Then He Lost His Horse

DESPITE numbing fatigue, Jennison rode light in the saddle with that unconscious artistry attained only by the few superlative horsemen. Never had Sunflower stood in greater need of his master's superb "feathering." For the gallant little buckskin was gamely slogging the muddy trail at the end of an eighty-mile trek done almost without pause within a scant ten hours. And now their destination was in all but whinnying distance, the cattle town of Dewlap on the ever tottering banks of Mad Creek.

At four o'clock that morning Jennison had left the camp of General McCook on Camas Creek where that turbulent stream cut its way free from the last buttressing foothills of the Somber Mountains. He had carried dispatches to Colonel Devers who with seven companies of the Fifth Cavalry was at some misty location over on the edge of these same mountains. McCook reckoned

that it would be roughly some fifty miles from his camp. No summer maneuvers these but a skilled effort to put a squeeze play on a ruthless band of marauding Indians, McCook to Devers.

A fortnight ago, the Sokulk Indians under the headship of their great chief Yatinneouts had slipped the confines of their reservation. About three hundred and fifty warriors, unencumbered with women and children, in that bloody two weeks they had cut a wide gash through thin settlements, scattered cattle towns and isolated mining camps. Now with the soldiers hard on their trail they seemed to be retreating toward the Somber Mountains, their age-old rendezvous and former home. Hence Jennison's mission. For McCook visualized a nut cracker operation, his force and Devers' the clamping jaws.

McCook had instructed Jennison to proceed from Devers' command to the Mad Creek valley to warn these settlers of the dangerous proximity of the hostiles. He was to urge them to rally on Dewlap, a point well adapted for defense. But the last two hours had convinced Jennison that his ride had been useless. Scattered cattle he had seen aplenty, but not one human being. At one deserted cabin, he had found an ancient lop-eared hound, who welcomed him riotously in cracked voice way. Slumbering probably when his master fled Dewlap way, one desertion was sufficient. Now he had lumbered diligently at Sunflower's twinkling heels, gradually distanced but lumbering still. Jennison, as gentle as he was brave, waited on occasions for the senile perambulator to wheel up.

These seasoned westerners had needed no Kosciusko to plot out their defenses, no Baron Steuben to train them. Each was engineer and general in his own right. Yet in time of crises they had a gift for leaderised cooperation, this too with slight surrender of their rugged individualism. So it was now. A stone corral had become a fort, stocked with provisions and water for man and beast. Alert pickets rode ceaseless guard. The few women and children, the armed men, all could have hustled into their stockade within five minutes following an alarm. At all of which Jennison nodded in weary but satisfied way as he slid from the saddle before Dad Grasty's saloon.

Dad Grasty, a leather-faced patriarch, greeted Jennison from the open door.

"Where in hell you come from Bat?"

"You ain't fur wrong at that Dad," Jennison okayed his suggested habitat. "I jest rode in frum Camas Crick."

"Camas Creek," Grasty reflected in terms of distance. "Say that's a smear of miles. Seventy-five anyway. How long on the trail?"

"I pulled out at four this morning, and now—it's two. Makes ten hours, I figger. General McCook thought mebby you people needed warnin', but frum the looks you've did your own warnin'."

"You betcha," Grasty nodded. "We're all set here. We'll give them Injuns a mighty hot reception if they caper this way."

"I'm sure hopin' they won't," Jennison said seriously. "Them Sokulks is plenty hard people, Dad."

"Well," Grasty countered chestily, "*we're* pretty hard people ourselves. What do you need most Bat, a drink? You look tuckered and so does your pony. Let's mosey over to the corral. Everything's there, including my whiskey."

As they walked along, Jennison looked at his pony to say in prideful way, "Sunflower's the best saddle hoss this side of the Rockies, Dad, barrin' none."

"I don't know an abler, Bat," Grasty conceded generously, "though that jug-headed roan of mine ain't no slouch. Probably could distance Sunflower for ten miles, but not for fifty. Yes, I'll admit Bat, that Sunflower is some horse." Then a sudden shift. "When did you eat Bat?"

"About a hour before I left the soldiers," Jennison told him. He could have added that he had slept but two hours within the last twenty-four. Also that he had just completed a seventy-mile scout before that long ago breakfast. But on another mount than Sunflower. But it went unsaid. In those stern pioneering days boasting was considered the personal property of the do-little clan.

Grasty, a competant trencherman himself, was shocked by the distance between Jennison's meals.

"Hell, Bat," he declared, "we'll fix that up in a damned swift hurry. The grub's at the corral too, along with the whiskey and so forth. Let's toddle over."

And now as they reached the corral, Jennison noticed a dog limping at Sunflower's heels and knew him for the cracked-voiced derelict unearthed at the deserted cabin. And he had collaboration in that moment of recognition, for a dirty-faced urchin was bawling rapturously,

"Pap, here's Ring! Come looky Pap, here's Ring!"

"Pap," arrived in leisurely fashion, agreed as to the identity of the footsore pilgrim adding, "Damned smart of that hound to smell out where we went! I knowed he would."

"Smell out hell," Jennison snorted. "I picked him up out at your cabin. You musta been some scared pardner to run off and leave your dog."

"I didn't run off and leave him," the other denied virtuously. "Hollered my lungs out, but no dog. Off chasing a rabbit likely. Come on, Ring, we'll rustle you up a bone or something similar."

It was not a feast for a Lucullus that presently graced an upended barrel, but then Jennison was no pampered epicure. At that it was a good solid food, well-cooked, well-seasoned, for garnishment a mighty appetite, and as to quantity prodigious. Jennison like his now luxuriating pony had fallen in with a class of gentry who felt they were being niggardly if in dealing out manna they used a lesser scoop than a power shovel. Jennison overlaid the food with two cups of semi-fluid, semi-solid steaming black coffee and nodded modestly for a refill. It stood untasted. It would remain untasted. For at the sudden impact of a savagely disturbing thought Jennison stood up quickly to rip a sharp question Grasty-way.

"Have the people at Tassel been warned?"

"Tassel, huh?" Grasty blinked. "No, Bat, I'm damned if we didn't forget 'em."

"The hell you tell it!" Jennison said explosively. "Well, it't got to be did. Git me that jug-headed roan, Dad. Sunflower cain't do it."

"It's too late. Nothin' but a Special Providence can save Tassel."

THE voice was deep, melancholy and chorded perfectly to the man who had uttered the doom-laden words. Jennison spun on his heel, for he knew the voice, the man, his iron cased creed. For he lived in a world not of immutable law but of whimsy caprice, a world of Special Providences. "Special Providence" Junkins he was, a peripathetic miner whose habitat was bounded only by gold strikes or rumors of strikes. Tall, thin as a lodge pole, gray-whiskered, bushy eyebrowed, his face was serene with a deep faith that he at least had been well-favored by The Almighty. Now he stood there holding the reins of a saddle pony whose trembling limbs and throbbing foam-flecked sides was a poem without words.

"Mr. Junkins," Jennison asked swiftly, "why did you say that about Tassel?"

"Only a Special Providence makes it so I can say it," Junkins answered simply. He paused a moment as if in tribute to this abiding care, then continued.

"I've got a mine back yonder," a ninety-degree sweep of a wrinkled hand was foggy direction, "and anyway that don't matter. This morning at daylight, and I hadn't lit my camp fire, I remembered a new-found patch of strawberries and figgered I'd pick a hat full for breakfast. I set out payin' no particular attention and then a Special Providence tucked me under the shadder of Its Wings. *For,*" he stressed it solemnly, "the wind was settin' opposite this morning from what it usually is, and so I smelt 'em—"

"Wild strawberries do smell," an enthusiast chipped in brightly.

"Strawberries hell!" Junkins said witheringly. "Injuns is what I smelt. I reckon I oughta know seein' as how I lived with 'em off and on two years. Anyway I smelt 'em and when I'd crawled a mite closer I heard 'em talkin'. Camped they was at a big spring in the bottom of the canyon. Well, I sneaked closer, where I could see 'em and hear what they was gabbin' about too. Sokulks they was, some twenty or so. I seen their chief, who was doin' the main talkin'. The Weasel, he was. You know about him, Bat?"

Yes indeed, Jennison knew The Weasel. Had seen him in fact often on the reservation. He was a sub chief, his small band of young warriors the most restless, troublesome and incorrigible in a tribe distinguished for lawlessness and crime. Plainly the hostiles were breaking up into small groups and would scatter like quail now

that the soldiers were drawing their net. Jennison waved the narrator on with an incisive question.

"About Tassel?"

"That's what The Weasel was talkin' about,' Junkins told him. "You remember maybe that 'bout a year ago, a damned blatherskite of a tenderfoot who jest happened to be at Tassel shot and killed a squaw there?"

"Yep," Jennison grunted, "The men at Tassel oughta hung the skunk."

"Couldn't catch him, Bat," Grasty volunteered. "He was forking too fast a horse for 'em."

"Well," Junkins continued, "the squaw was a Sokulk from The Weasel's band. And you know Injuns."

"Yes," said Grasty out of a wide experience, "skin an Injun and you'll furnish the hide to cover up his raw spot, about ten inches to one. Also he never forgets nor forgives a wrong."

"Nor a right neither," Jennison asserted justly. "And should he give his word, you don't need no bond, 'less," he qualified, "you've tricked him. But go on, Mr. Junkins."

"Well, that's what they was talkin' 'bout," Junkins obliged. "They're goin' to clean Tassel out."

"Give out any notion when?" Jennison asked anxiously.

"Not exact," and Junkins hesitated lest he betray the *locus* of his mine. "But judgin' from where they was at this mornin' and so forth, they'll hit Tassel comes daylight tomorrow mornin'. Injuns don't travel at night on account they're afraid of spirits."

"Apaches don't," Grasty recalled, "but I don't know about Sokulks."

"Why, I don't know," Jennison contributed, "but Siwashes seldom if ever travel of nights."

"They ain't goin' to kill the women," Junkins concluded. "The Weasel said so."

"Git me your hoss, Dad," Jennison said swiftly. "And whilst I'm saddlin' up I wish somebody 'ud fill my canteen and rustle up a little grub."

"But, Bat," Grasty expostulated, "you can't make it. That damned cloud burst wrecked the trail upcreek. And five miles of it hanging onto that shelf up on the side of the Ribbon Rocks! It's dangerous even in dry weather, Bat, you know that for you've travelled it yourself. Now it would be just plain suicide."

"But, Dad," Jennison reminded him. "They ain't goin' to kill the women. Mebby you know—"

"My sister—" a long pause "—after five days. I'll get the horse Bat."

Within ten minutes he was ready. One pocket of his *cantinas* was strutted with monolithic sandwiches, the craftsmanship of the owner of the retrieved Ring. In the other pocket of his *cantinas* reposed two quart bottles of Old Crow, gifts of Dad Grasty. It was three o'clock when the camp gave him huzzah and a welter of good wishes, and Baldy, the jug-headed roan set his educated hoofs to the trail. Thirty miles angled up before him, and Jennison gave himself twelve hours. If only he could outspeed the Indians!

Within a half mile of Dewlap, Mad Creek Valley narrowed without preliminaries, canyon walls rose at steeple-like gradient and the trail stumbled upward within mist-tossing distance of the brawling creek. It would be so for a dozen miles. Even here it was a trail by courtesy only, a sometime way back into the Somber Mountains for casual prospectors, a scattering of Indians, huckleberry-minded, an occasional outlaw seeking sanctuary, a cowman after straying stock. A rough trail surfaced chiefly with jagged rock, a snail-like thoroughfare even in dry weather. Now bedeviled with debris and slick from the rain, Jennison found progress agonizingly slow. And a certain minimum of speed was of the very essence of his venture. Baldy the gallant roan was a master of bad trails, and Jennison gave him his head, volunteering little beyond subtle urgings for a fractional second's increase in speed. Two hours of hoarded time saw twelve miles skidded away under Baldy's skillful feet. So it was five o'clock when Jennison stood at the gates of the ledge trail which clung like an uncertain brown thread to the face of the far-famed Ribbon Rocks.

Its striated horizontal coloring demanded the apt naming. It marched sturdily up-canyon for five miles on the east bank of Mad Creek, and so on Jennison's right hand for he was riding almost due north now. Its face angle was very nearly ninety degrees,

though to the nervous pilgrim wandering that way it seemed to lean outward. The Indians related that at first it stood as a solid unit, a good two hundred feet in height. Then they contended that a rollicking *Manitou* (god) roamed down the valley, considered that mighty cliff and in puckish way elected a change. Resting his mighty hands against the barrier, he pushed, opening up a lengthwise seam from end to end of the cliff. It would seem this feat had sufficed a *Manitou* even. But not he. Once more he heaved, sliding the top half backward, forming a ledge along which crippled the limping shadow of a trail. Yet the only direct way to the Somber Mountains and Tassel. Any other was a matter of forty-eight hours. And Jennison had a scant twelve.

Now he dismounted to make a hundred-yard survey of the trail. It was worse, far worse than he had anticipated. The rain here had plainly been of a Noah's deluge vintage. The five-mile cliff had been a thin-clad waterfall then, the ledge burdened with its leavings of gravel, grass, uprooted bushes, occasional boulders, all coated with slimy mud. Jennison shook his head at the sight, squared his shoulders and turned resolutely about. He had remembered the women.

Had the *Manitou* been mathematically minded, his trail blazing might have been tolerable. But he had levered capriciously or at purposeless random. There was indentured coves where the shelf was rods in depth, there were projecting spires where a scant yard was the ultimate width in footage.

At these points of extreme peril Jennison dismounted, hooked his inside stirrup over the saddle horn for extra clearage, and reins in hand, moved crabwise along the cliff keeping a constant eye on his horse. His vigilance at length bore fruit. Baldy's left hind foot had found unstable anchorage on a slippery pebble and skidded off the ledge. There followed a clipped second of tense struggle while Jennison threw all his strength on reins and headstall, and Baldy fought gamely for a toe hold. And won it. Jennison brushed the back of his hand across a sweaty forehead.

"Baldy," he panted admiringly, "next to Sunflower, and I mean almighty close next, too, you're the best hoss west of the Rockies."

In two hours they had battled and won four miles of that ferocious trail. It was seven o'clock now and the shadows were beginning to lower even though the day was the second of July. And then, with only one mile of the Ribbon Rocks trail to be conquered they reached Baldy's Thermopylae. When, too, the going had been easiest. They had just passed over one of those wide indentured spots, rounded the further corner and within ten yards a hundred-foot chasm yawned at Baldy's nose. Twenty feet of shelf had disappeared into the gulf beneath.

Jennison dismounted slowly, backed Baldy a couple of yards, then advanced to appraise the possibilities. Further progress for the horse was barred. It is alleged that Kyrat, the chestnut steed of Kurroglu the bandit chief made a standing leap of thirty feet, with Kurroglu aboard. But Baldy was a roan, this was not Koordistan, and he did not have a distinguished poet to limn the deed. More than that he couldn't do it. A deer, a couger, but not Baldy. Yes further progress for Baldy was barred, but was it for the man?

THE ledge where Jennison stood was about three feet wide, it looked a bit less on the other side. According to the rule of diminishing perspective it should appear so. And twenty feet lay between. As in the Leap of Kurroglu, "On air must ride, he who crosses this ravine." It was high tide for one of Junkins' "Special Providences," and now to Jennison's searching eye one made a shy bow. A shadowy possibility, a thousandth chance, but there was a chance. Near the center of the clipped arch, and about ten feet above the ledge a gargoyled lump of rock protruded from the sheer wall. A foot or so in diameter and knobbled on the trail side it was a simple target for a lariat cast. And Jennison had snared the fleeting heels of many an errant calf. Hands on hips, he considered, but very briefly. He hurried back to his horse, untied his lariat and returned resolved to yield to temptation.

Throwing with his left hand as now, presented no difficulties to Jennison who was for all practical purposes ambidextrous.

He ringed the nodule at the first toss, noted with satisfaction that the noose was well inside the projecting outer flange then drew it taut. Now he surged back with all his power. If there was a flaw in this stone spindle a weakness, he would discover it now, not while dangling over a hundred foot abyss. The experiment was thorough. Any professor of stresses or tortions would have marked him 100. He anchored the loose end of the lariat very securely, then turned back sadly to his horse.

For he must set his faithful trail companion to the back road. First of all he removed his Winchester from its canvass scabbard and hung the rifle over his shoulder by its sling. Two gargantuan sandwiches were crammed down into the cliff side pocket of his mackinaw. One quart bottle of Old Crow found sanctuary not by accident in the *outside* mackinaw pocket. And now to write a letter without words to the men at Dewlap, a message they would be quick to read and understand. He tied the bridle reins about the saddle horn, but not in check-rein style, looped both stirrups likewise over the horn, loosed the cinch a bit for Baldy's comfort and the note was completed. A book could not have made it plainer to those seasoned westerners. Deliberately Jennison had abandoned his horse. Why, they could not know. But the fact would stand. Now he turned Baldy toward home and patted him lightly on the rump and like the good soldier he was, Baldy obeyed.

Again Bat stood on the brink of the chasm, the rope taut in his hands as he calculated his grapevine hazard. No mathematician was Bat Jennison. He was unacquainted with the *pons asinorum* of Euclid. But he did know that the outjutting rock was a bit farther from his side of the trail than from the other, and consequently the distance from the nodule there a bit less than from where he stood. So he spit lustily into his toughened palms, reached high, gripped the rope like a vise, and launched into space. The fabled Kyrat had nothing on Jennison. He made it, with two yards to spare. And he landed so lightly that the liquor scarcely gave up a gurgle.

Most men would have left the lariat, there were times that Jennison would not have tarried to retrieve it. But this was not one of those times. An inner admonition, one of his inexplicable hunches demanded that he secure it. Ten minutes skillful maneuvering and it was done. Coiling it over a shoulder he was ready to push ahead. It was just between heavy dusk and dungeon darkness now. Soon he was bumping the fingers of his right hand along the uneven surface of the cliffs as his only surety against straying creekward. And he felt the trail before him yard by yard, a castaway Indian lodge pole his sounding rod.

There came a time when his fingers no longer tattooed along slimy rock. The cliff was gone. He had passed the Ribbon Rocks. The trail here was easier, though no boulevard. Then he was out of Mad Creek Canyon, out too with startling suddenness into the pale light of a new moon at the quarter. A glimpse at his watch told him it was nine o'clock. He had twelve miles yet to do, and as he calculated about six hours in which to do it.

A ribbon of water, silvered by the moonlight curved across the trail. Jennison knelt, drank gustily, paused and drank again. Now he sat down heavily on a flat rock and fumbled forth one of the monolithic sandwiches. He ate slowly, his munchings chorded not all to his racing thoughts. To remark that he was very uneasy is fingering the notes very lightly indeed. Within the past thirty hours he had slept but two. In that time he had ridden some hundred and seventy miles, and had walked two over trails that were an abomination. And must walk a dozen more. He wore high-heeled narrow-toed riding boots, the worst gear possible for foot traveling. A hundred dollars would have seemed paltry indeed in exchange for the thick-soled high-ankled moccasins reposing in his warbag at Dewlap. And he dared not solace his tortured feet by laboring off his boots. To draw them on again presently would have been impossible.

Most emphatically Jennison was not hunched there beside the trail indulging in a wailing jamboree anent his own woes. Of course his feet hurt. But hell! Thousands had hurt worse. Not only feet. Legs too. Pegleg Smith's, for instance, gangrened from a poisonous arrow and amputated later by that self-same Smith. No. Jennison needed no crying rag to sop up the tears shed by Jennison over Jennison. His

thoughts were twelve miles distant, brooding above Tassel, its twelve men, its one woman. The woman who was not to be killed, so said The Weasel, if Junkins had heard and relayed a-right. He turned to the thought of night-traveling Indians, and wrinkled his brows in uncertainty. The uncertainty shortened his halt, and impelled him to empty out unsmoked a half pipeful of plug cut tobacco. Proof of his unease could scarcely be climaxed.

By one o'clock he was roughly three miles away. Here the trail emerged from the trees to stride up a stiff hogback. From its summit Jennison remembered Tassel was in view. That is by day. Not now probably, by the thin light of a moon all but setting in the west. Three miles and two hours to do it in. Hell! With an extra spurt of his aching feet he'd do it in one hour. So he trudged on in crippled briskness, even tempted to whistle, though being stone deaf no tune would have emerged. Halfway up the slope he panted to a stop. A boulder invited, he half sat then straightened up. There, ahead of him light stippled the sky. And he knew it for what it was. The Indians *had* traveled by night!

TWO hours later Jennison was spying the lightly smoking ruins of Tassel. He had not hurried during those last two hours. For from the tragic moment when he had known that haste now was utterly useless. The Indians driven by two urges had traveled by day and by night, and would travel this coming day also. For they were making for the deep recesses of the Somber Mountains, no doubt acutely aware that the soldiers were closing in. The other urge, equally as potent was to wreak vengeance on Tassel for the year-ago killing of the squaw. They would glut their unwearying sense of revenge, but they would not tarry at Tassel. The six flaming cabins would be like torches to light them on their way. No. He need not hurry now.

Yet Jennison had lived too long within whispering distance of death to lose time-seasoned sense of caution even now. Where Indians were a section of your problem, circumspection must be the regnant rule of conduct. So now from a screen of buck brush, he inventoried the camp with meticulous care. Thin spindles of smoke lazed up from six flat piles of ashed-over debris. These had been the cabins. Bodies lay scattered like leaves heaped and stirred by a careless breeze. But no life. Then Jennison noted the birds and cursed bitterly. Magpies, those merciless scavangers, who rended indifferently dead flesh or pulsing living tissue, busy at what, he knew full well.

At his approach they hopped aside, railing at him with obscene insolent chatter. The bodies of the twelve men lay crumpled grotesquely shot down as they fled their burning cabins. Some fully dressed other than their boots, some in two-piece flannel underwear. Just as they had slept. And he must find them sepulcher. The tomb was ready made and at hand. Just behind one of the cabins was a cellar, its sides of heavy logs, built around a bubbling spring whose temperature was very near to ice water. Roofed with poles and brush and covered with dirt, it had thus escaped the fire. It would be messy work and Jennison shrugged out of his mackinaw and stripped off both shirts before he undertook it. And when the twelve had been corded into this unique tomb, he closed the heavy door and blocked it well. There were predatory animals in these mountains who would not be long in scenting the kill.

HANGING limply on a bush in the rear of what had once been a cabin was a calico dress, reading its own sad riddle in its patched and faded loneliness. Jennison approached it slowly, touched it almost reverently, then pivoted swiftly away. One of Junkins' Special Providences seemed in the immediate making. For Jennison had heard the plaintive whinnying of a companionless horse. As that interrogating neigh shattered that cankering silence, Jennison knew why he had clung to his lariat through the long hours of the night.

The horse was in sight now, the length of two football fields away, in a little meadow somewhat behind the camp. Jennison well versed in the strategy of wooing the frightened and highly suspicious animal, strolled nonchalantly his way, his looped lasso in evidence not at all. For that the animal was frightened was evidenced by his ears pointed forward, disten-

sion of his nostrils, rolling eyes, his constant alertness for a wild stampede. The fire, the rifle shots, the war whoop doubtless also shrieks of pain and despair, the odor of blood, all had played their part in the wild panic that possessed him. Yet in slow-footed time Jennison won him.

No longer young was this horse, yet he looked durable. Twelve hundred pounds of professional saddle pony, with the stigmata of his craft stencilled on his plump black sides. The marks of the cinch were recent and Jennison looked about hopefully for a saddle. He found it in a tumbled-down shed that had escaped the torch. Not a new saddle, but serviceable after the stirrups had been shortened in deference to Jennison's brief legs. A sweat blanket and bridle hung on wooden pegs by the saddle. Jennison observed with satisfaction that the bridle bit was straight. He scorned the scissors bit or the spade bit as fit only for barbarians.

In the cellar that was to be a charnel house, Jennison had found a bit of food, a few pounds of salt pork, fat, rancid, but manna no less to this very hungry man. Not a hundred yards beyond the camp he halted to sample his treasure. He broiled it before a little fire, and ate it with keen relish, while the saddle pony grazed contentedly at the end of its picket rope.

Jennison was very tired. Within the past thirty-eight hours he had slept but two. For twenty-four hours now he had not closed his eyes. Add to this that in the past twenty-four hours he had traveled two hundred ten miles, twelve of them on foot, and you have sufficient causes for his great weariness. Iron man that he was, rest even brief was imperative.

Now Jennison was one of those unique men whose canny brain harbored an alarm clock, which could function at will to the unvarying second. So now he set it for a thirty minute vigil, stretched out on the moss and in ten ticks of a watch was asleep. Thirty minutes later his mental monitor according to agreement clamored him awake resurgent both in brain and body. For thirty minutes of such profound submergence, timeless and dreamless, is worth hours of casual desultory surface sleeping. In five minutes Jennison had left the ruins of Tassel forever.

The Indians had plowed a straight furrow through the tall grass, as they pointed for a notch in an outthrust of the foothills, two miles or so away. Jennison reading signs that to him were more legible than printed page knew that the trail was some four hours old. And they were driving hard. Warned no doubt by their incomparable scouts of the impending maneuver of the soldiers, they were pushing relentlessly for the gloomy fastnesses of the Somber Mountains. Once there, further pursuit would be sheer folly. Yes, they were driving hard. They had traveled yesterday, last night and would travel all this day. For no Tarter horseman however seasoned could outlast or outgame an American Indian out on a raid. Jennison would see debris cast aside by these hard traveling warriors, disabled and worn out ponies, jettisoned in their race for sanctuary. Ponies too that scorned fellowship with Jennison's mount, but would cripple aside to avoid contamination. Perhaps, Jennison reflected, a white man smelled as offensively to an Indian's cayuse as an Indian did to a white man's horse. It raised a slow grin on his weathered face. It would be, he reckoned, the mating of superlatives.

By four o'clock that afternoon Jennison had gained two hours on the Indians. He could have done better had he wished, for the spent ponies, even under the constant tattoo of leaded quirts were no match for his mount. He could have overhauled them now within two hours had his plans demanded. But he was playing a far subtler game than that. Overhauling them was easy. What to do when that was done, and how, was a vastly different problem. And to that he had a solid answer. He had it indeed when from that craggy hogback he saw that Tassel had already blossomed into flame.

THEY had penetrated now into a wildly desolate and uncharted region, known only to the Sokulks who had harbored here for generations before they had been beguiled with many specious promises to forsake its dazzling freedom for the drab restraint of a reservation. They had known it and loved it, now they were returning. Not again could they be lured away. They were pointing now for an ancient camping

ground, at the bottom of a steep-sided gloomy gorge ending as an authentic box canyon. Tucked against its unscalable end their ponies needed no night guarding. Two hundred yards short of that breachless wall a great spring gushed from the side of the canyon. Here from time immemorial the Sokulks had camped. Even now after five years of expatriation the rotting framework of some old wigwams were still standing, waiting patiently for the return of their masters.

It was sundown when they reached this ancient citadel. The leg-weary cayuses were herded up into the natural corral, a few grimy blankets draped hastily over a teepee skeleton to masquerade shamelessly as a wigwam for The Weasel, wood was gathered, a giant campfire roared. Like Tartars, like Eskimos, like all primitive peoples, the Indians would feast in Gargantuan fashion. Two elks, and two deer after days of short rations would be vanquished ere midnight.

Jennison was but a mile away when the Indians straggled into camp. He halted here and when the light from the Indian's campfire began to dent the darkening sky he dismounted and unsaddled his horse and picketed him out in a lush little meadow fringed with bushes. Now he built a modest fire and toasted thin slices from the salt pork. And he sliced frugally. That bit of rancid meat must banquet both the captive woman and himself well out of these mountains. And he smoked as skimpily. Tobacco was as near to zero as food. As he ground out the dottle beneath his heel he reflected that it would be two hours before moonlight, made sensible progress possible. Therefore, he would sleep two hours.

A terrified snort from his tethered horse, the "woof" of a startled bear jarred him instantly awake. As he leaped to his feet he heard the frenzied horse surge wildly at the stake rope, then he shot out into a patch of moonlight and pelted away down the home trail as if all the imps in hell were at his heels. The lariat, caught under the knife-like edge of a malevolent boulder had been neatly severed. Jennison's matured plan of rescue and escape had been shorn away. A simultaneous crashing of the underbrush testified to the flight of the bear. Jennison was alone with his problem.

So when the sound of flailing hoofs had beat itself into nothingness, Jennison sat down to consider. His plan of rescue had had in it the genius of simplicity. To steal away the woman from the gorging Indians, to escape with her on the sturdy horse, and in the five hours of respite before the flight was discovered to win free of these gloomy gorges, all had seemed possible. Then by the time the Indians had discovered her missing he and the captive would be nearing the place toward which the two columns of soldiers were pushing with desperate energy. If only he had not lost the horse!

They could not escape on foot. He could alone but not the two. These incomparable trackers would ferret them out. Nor could he defend her against them. No. In this plan there was not even the flick of a passing hope. There was then but one way. And it must be daylight when he essayed this supreme dicing with chance.

An hour later he was within whistling distance of the Indian camp. The feast was still at high tide. Indefatigable on the war trails they were also indefatigable trenchermen. As they moved about in the red glow of the campfire he tried to count them. Junkins had reported them at twenty, and Jennison without exact verification, agreed. He caught not a glimps of the woman nor The Weasel. Doubtless the makeshift teepee housed them. So he studied it and its approaches with meticulous care. It was nearer to him than the campfire by twenty yards. It perched near the end of a smooth grassy slope that was the camp site. On his side the teepee was all but touched by a head-high growth of elk brush. For once, he concluded the gods had been kind. Had they forseen his plans, they could hardly have done better.

BY TWELVE o'clock the banqueting had approached its nadir. Yet there were still some seasoned campaigners skirmishing away the dismantled remains. But when the last section of backbone had been duly cracked and the red-hot marrow suctioned from its channels these durable foragers joined their less durable comrades already stretched on the grass around the smouldering fire. They sprawled there like

bloated anacondas but unlike these giant water snakes could shed their torpor all but instantly. And how those food-logged savages snored!

Before three o'clock the cloudless eastern sky had become a pale greenish shield. It was hard upon the dawn. The zero hour was tiptoeing into view. Jennison must prepare to act. Sliding stealthily through the bushes like a marauding fox, he lay within touching distance of the teepee wall. Ill-favored it was, and redolent. Yet he noted neither its color nor chafed at the odor. The sounds from within its dingy walls captured and held his interest. One was a robust full-bodied snoring. That would be The Weasel. And then between the ebbs and flows of that rhythmic dissonance, Jennison caught another sound, a muted shuddering sob, like a babe's in fitful slumber. The woman. As tender as he was brave, that pitiful hopeless sigh tugged mightily at Jennison's heart. Yet he must wait the dawning. Did wait until that green eastern shield had bleached to pearly white. Until he could even see the veins on the idly swaying birch leaves above him.

Very slowly and with infinite caution Jennison pushed up the blanket wall and peered into the wigwam. Nearest to the V-shaped opening that was the door loomed the motionless body of the chief. And what a body! Six feet two was The Weasel, his mighty chest now rising and falling with his even breathing, naked to the navel, covered thence with a gaudy blanket. Then the woman. Trussed up with brutal thoroughness, she lay near Jennison's side wall, covered indifferently with a worn and filthy blanket. Her breathing mere pulsing of the tattered blanket.

Jennison, a cocked forty-five Colt's in his fist crept like a shadow into the teepee and crouching set his stockened feet firmly beneath him. And then the woman saw him and into her eyes leaped the wondering gladness that must have glowed in the eyes of Lazarus as he looked forth from the tomb. Nor did she need the admonition to silence conveyed by Jennison's imperative glance. The wonder is that she did not swoon with ecstasy. Now Jennison was hovering over the big Indian, his pistol pointing at the base of the corded neck, the muzzle not yet in contact but soon to be. And leaning so, he whispered in the Indian tongue into the chief's unlaundered ear:

"Move not, call not, lest tonight thou sleepest with they fathers."

A whisper they say will rouse the deepest sleeper and so it was now with The Weasel. The words, their import, his peril cut through The Weasel's sleep and mastered his brain. He was awake now. Slowly his eyes lidded open, deep somber black eyes looked into cold implacable gray, gripped and held. When he spoke it was not in the Indian tongue but rather with Haskell School precision.

"Bat Jennison," he rumbled from deep in his chest, "speak English. I will understand."

"All right," Jennison whispered, as he settled the muzzle of his pistol snuggly against the Indian's powerful neck, "I'm offerin' you a trade, your life fur the woman's."

"It cannot be," the guttural negative was rock-like and unbending. "Her man awaits her now. Did not the men at Tassel rob him of his other woman? She is for him. No. It cannot be."

"It *can* be," and Jennison pressed the muzzle a shadow line more deeply. "I'm still offerin' you that even trade."

"And if I refuse what can you do? You can kill me, but you and the woman cannot escape."

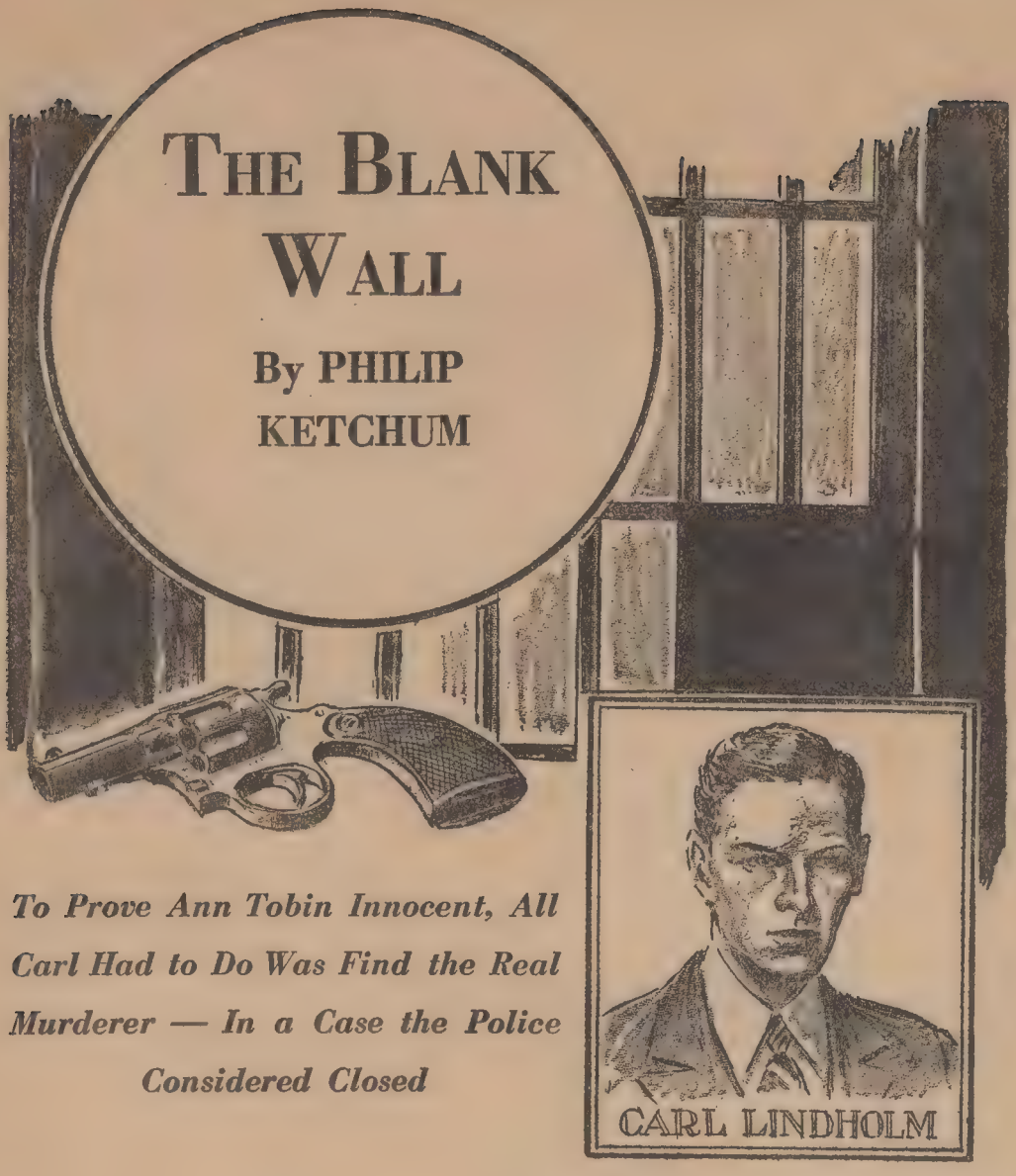
"I'll kill you. I'll kill the woman, then I'll kill myself. Thar ain't no other trail to follow."

That simple declaration voiced the grandeur of despair, the uttermost reach of intrepidity, the iron will that can know no swerving. The Weasel pondered. And strangely enough, his death or his survival were not present elements of his thought. For death was but an incident of life, a trivial thing indeed compared to honor, courage, the adamantine will. And as he pondered admiration deepened for this little man who dared so great a deed.

"Bat Jennison," said he at length, "I give you my word. You and the woman shall go free." Then the poetry innate in him flowered into life. "For there is none braver beneath the stars."

THE BLANK WALL

By PHILIP KETCHUM



To Prove Ann Tobin Innocent, All Carl Had to Do Was Find the Real Murderer — In a Case the Police Considered Closed

I

HE WAS in Gary's apartment. There had been cocktails and dinner and a lot of idle talk. The lights were low and the radio gave out with soft music. Here was a warm and friendly place with everything calculated to put a man at ease and yet the tight, nervous feeling which had gripped him this afternoon was still there. It was like a fever in his blood, a fever with icy, cold fingers.

He got up and crossed to the curtained window and pulled it open just a little at the edge. The man outside was still there. He stood in the shelter of a doorway across the street, a thin, dark figure, scarcely discernible.

Gary came in from the kitchen. She said, "What's the matter, Carl? You've been acting like a caged lion."

Carl Lindholm turned around. He managed a laugh. "I'm no lion, Gary. I feel much more like a mouse."

Gary crossed over to a chair and sat down. She lit a cigarette. She wasn't tall or short but somewhere in between. She was about

thirty, Carl supposed, or maybe a little older. He could never guess a woman's age. Right now, with her feet tucked up under her and wholly relaxed, she looked almost like one of the very realistic reporters on the *Daily World*. She had soft, brown hair, worn in a loose bob and tied with a ribbon and she was smiling.

"Come on, Carl," she ordered. "Sit down and tell me about it."

Carl sat down. He scowled at the floor. He didn't know where to start.

"You've got it bad," Gary said easily. "You're in love with her, crazy in love with her, maybe so crazy in love that your judgment's no good."

"My judgment is good about one thing," Carl answered. "She didn't kill John Ringling."

"The servants found her in his study with the gun which killed him in her hand. It was her gun, one she had bought though she denied it. Ten years ago John Ringling was responsible for the death of her sister. That's a lot to overlook, Carl."

"I'm not overlooking it, any of it," Carl said slowly, "but I know Ann Tobin almost as well as a man could know his wife. I know what she likes and what she doesn't like. I know how she thinks, what she believes in, what her principles are and how strong they are. I know her temperament.

Gary, I know her and I know she didn't kill John Ringling. Discount all that and I know it for one simple reason. She said she didn't."

Gary shrugged her shoulders. "You've not covered as many murder trials as I have, Carl."

"Do you think she killed him?"

"No, but I'm trying to show you what you'll go up against if you try to prove anything else. I met Ann Tobin several months ago when I went out to the Lasco plant on a story. She showed me around the place and she wasn't like the ordinary guide. She was friendly, helpful. I had the feeling all through the trial that she couldn't have killed John Ringling, but every bit of evidence pointed the other way."

Carl leaned forward. "Will you help me break this thing, Gary? Will you help me get to the truth?"

"Why pick on me?"

Carl got up. He took a turn around the room and then stopped, facing the girl. "I'm picking on you," he said slowly, "because I've got to have help. I've got to have someone to talk things over with, someone to go with me to see some of the people I've got to see, someone who knows the angles in this city like you do. I'm picking on you because you don't think Ann is guilty and because there's a story in it, a real story when we break the case."

Gary frowned. She lit another cigarette. "Some day," she smiled, "I'll meet a man who is interested in Gary Ingerman, alone. Where do we start, Carl?"

THIS was the first encouragement he had received. Carl Lindholm grinned. He could have thrown his arms around Gary and hugged her. "I knew you'd do it," he told her. "Gary, you're fine."

"No, I'm a chump. I'm an easy mark for tall, slender young men with blue, dreamy eyes and a square, stubborn jaw. You've been working at this already, haven't you?"

"It's been three weeks since Ann Tobin was sentenced. You're not the kind to sit around for three weeks biting your fingernails. What have you done? What do you plan on doing?"

"I've been talking to people. Talking, asking questions. I've gone over and over all that was said at the trial. Somewhere, in the case against Ann Tobin, there's a hole. We've got to find it, make it larger, make it large enough for Ann to walk through and then close it around the one who is guilty. The hole is there, Gary. I know it. The hole is there even if it's hidden. All I can see to do is beat against the evidence until the hole shows up."

Gary nodded. She said, "Go on, keep talking."

"John Ringling was killed in his study at eight-thirty at night. The study of his house is just a little ways off the street. It has an outside door. Ann went in that way to see him. Any one of a dozen other people could have gone in that way."

"Any one of a million," Gary suggested.

"No, there weren't a million people who wanted to see John Ringling dead. But there were some, a few, Gary, who had as much or more of a motive than Ann Tobin."

"Name them."

"Sam McCaffery, a gambler, racketeer, a bitter enemy of John Ringling for years. Fred Wallace, a fortune hunter who is in love with Ringling's wife, or perhaps the money she now controls. Maida Ringling, who never loved her husband, and who now is free. Sara Condit and Nick Van Hefflin, who were involved in a shake-down scheme, only Ringling refused to pay off."

"That was never proven, Carl."

"But I'm satisfied it's true."

"And Ann Tobin?"

"Yes," Carl admitted, "Ann Tobin, who had a motive but who didn't kill him, Gary. We know that, and someone else knows it."

Gary leaned back and closed her eyes. Carl took another turn around the room. He stopped at the curtained window and took a careful look outside. The man in the shadowed doorway was still there. That man would follow him when he left here just as he had followed him all day and all day the day before.

Here, Carl abruptly realized, was proof he was on the right track. Someone was worried. Someone didn't like the questions he was asking. Someone was interested in what he was doing, interested enough to keep a close check on him.

He turned away from the window, frowning. Someone was interested in him, but whom. He had talked to all those he had mentioned to Gary. He had talked to others,

Ollie Meyers, the gruff, ugly, square-faced detective, who had been in charge of the case; Joseph Stoner, the man who had claimed to have sold Ann the gun which was used to kill John Ringling, and Henry Price, who was Ringling's law partner. Somewhere and at some time during these past weeks, he had faced and had talked to the murderer. There was no other way to figure it. The man who followed him was his proof.

He didn't know anything about detective work. That was his trouble. He didn't know how to weigh and analyze the material he uncovered. He didn't know how to tell a lie from the truth when the background of a statement was clouded. He was twenty-nine. He was an office manager. He understood business organization, forms and filing systems and records. He was plunging now into something with which he was wholly unfamiliar. He stood there against the wall near the window, a tall, thin man, deeply disturbed by all this and clinging only to the one truth he felt he could count on, his belief that Ann Tobin was innocent.

"You'll talk to them," Gary said slowly. "You'll ask them questions. Those who are innocent will be annoyed at being bothered. The one who is guilty will be annoyed, and will be worried, too. As long as he thinks he's safe he may not do anything but if you get too close to him there may be a traffic accident some night or someone behind you when you're standing at a window in a tall building. It's a dangerous game, Carl. You may be playing with fire."

Carl Lindholm shrugged his shoulders.

"They'll all lie to you a little," Gary went on, "for no man's life is a very open book. And most of the lies won't be important for they will be made to cover up something which has no connection with Ringling's murder. You've got to realize that."

This was what Carl wanted. Help like this, objective analysis of the task he faced.

"The police won't like what you're doing," Gary continued. "Some of those you talk to will complain to the police. Meyers will land on you like a ton of brick. He'll tell you the case is closed. He'll tell you to forget it."

"But I won't."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Help me understand what I learn. Give me a little direction. Tonight, for instance, I am going to see Maida Ringling. Tell me about her."

"You're going to see her tonight."

"As soon as I leave here. She said drop up anytime."

"She would, the cat."

Carl grinned. "You don't like her."

"I don't like her. I envy her but only her money, her beauty, her position and the cool, sure way she has of facing the world. I wouldn't want to be Maida Ringling."

"Who was she before she married John Ringling?"

"Her name was Throop. That's like Cabot is supposed to be in Boston. An old family here, money, position, prestige. I don't know many of the Throops, but I can't imagine many were like Maida. She's as cold as winter and back of her beautiful face is a calculating mind, as efficient as a machine. She would never have married Fred Wallace for he couldn't give her anything she couldn't get from him without marriage. Beware of her, Carl. She is a dangerous female, a black Madonna."

"You only make her sound interesting."

"Beware of her."

"I'll call you up tonight and tell you what happened."

"Not if it's too late. I have to get my beauty sleep early. Maida Ringling can stay in bed until noon and probably does."

Carl got his hat and coat and Gary opened the door for him. She said, "Carl, you're a crazy Swede but I think I love you for it. We're both of us crazy to try a thing like this. Take care of yourself, will you?"

Carl grinned and nodded. Some of the tension, at least, was gone. It was gone in spite of that man waiting outside. It had been wiped away by Gary Ingerman's understanding and encouragement. He wasn't alone in this any longer. He said, "Lunch, tomorrow, Gary," and the girl nodded and he turned toward the elevator.

THE man outside was still in the doorway across the street but Carl hardly glanced at him. He walked to the corner and looked for a taxi. There wasn't one in sight. A cool night wind blowing in from the ocean drove its penetrating dampness against him. He started up the street and after a while glanced over his shoulder. The man who

had been following him wasn't in sight but a car had just turned the far corner, a car without any lights.

Carl walked on. He took another look over his shoulder and a sudden panic gripped him. The car without lights was heading straight at him, was almost upon him. Its front wheels hit the curb and jumped it.

For an instant Carl couldn't move. Every muscle in his body seemed paralyzed. A scream tore at his throat but couldn't get through. And then, in some way or other, he was scrambling aside, his muscles were working again, were answering the startled command of his mind. There was a low fence here and he spilled over it. He heard the screaming of the car's tires as they swung on the sidewalk and off again and then the throbbing of the motor as the car roared away.

He sat up, got to his feet and leaned against the fence. He was shaking all over. His body was moist with a warm, sticky perspiration. His breath was uneven. He stared in the way the car had gone but it was out of sight. What kind of a car had it been, Ford, Chrysler, Chevvy? He didn't know. And the driver, who had been the driver? He couldn't remember even having seen anyone in the driver's seat. He told himself that this could have been an accident but he knew it wasn't. Someone had tried to kill him, and tried deliberately to run him down.

Carl mopped a hand over his face. "Ann," he said huskily. "Ann, I'm on the right track. Do you hear me, Ann? I'm getting there. I'm getting close to someone."

He closed his eyes and could see Ann's face as he had seen it on the last day of the trial. A thin face, showing the strain she had been under, but still clear eyed and brave and unafraid.

"I'm getting there, Ann," he said again. "I'm getting there."

II

THE taxi let him out in front of the Ringling home on Pacific Heights. He paid his bill and looked down the street up which they had come. Was he still being followed? He didn't know. A car had stopped a block down the hill but that might not mean anything.

"It's getting pretty cold at night," said the taxi driver. "I keep smelling snow but it's only fog."

Carl Lindholm made some casual answer. He turned up the walk toward the house. Over to the left was the study and the study door through which Ann Tobin had gone on the night of the murder. Ringling's letter to her had told her to come to the study door and had named the day and time. She had come and had found the door open and had seen Ringling inside at his desk. She had knocked and had guessed almost immediately that something was wrong, had guessed it from the way Ringling was slumped forward over the desk. She had stepped inside.

"I saw the gun on the desk," she had said on the witness stand. "I heard a noise at the door behind me. I thought whoever killed him might still be in the room. I was frightened. I picked up the gun and turned around. The hall door opened. The butler was standing there. That's how I happened to touch the gun. You say it is mine and that I bought it. I never saw it before in my life."

"How did you know it was the butler who opened the door?" had asked the district attorney.

"I have learned since then that it was the butler."

"But you didn't know it at the time."

"No. That's why I pointed the gun at him. I didn't know who the man was."

"Did you think he was the murderer?"

"I don't think I was thinking at all. I was just frightened."

There was the study door, close to the street, easily available to anyone and open on the night of the murder so that Ann could see into the room, see the man slumped over the desk. Open so that she could walk in and be found there.

Carl's lips tightened. The defense had tried to make something of this but had failed. It was a weak gesture in the face of the gun in Ann's hand and her motive for murder.

The muted sound of the door chimes came to Carl's ears as he pressed the bell button and a moment later the door was opened by Antoine, who had opened the door to the study on the night of the murder and had seen Ann Tobin with the gun

in her hand. He was a tall and dignified man, this Ringling butler, and his thin face showed no expression as he looked out at Carl. "Madame is expecting you," he said quietly. "She is in the library."

Carl stepped into the hall and gave the butler his hat and coat. This was a wide hall with a high frescoed ceiling. It was larger than Carl's room and it was dim and fragrant with the faint smell of sandlewood. Straight ahead was a circling marble stairway, to the left the study door and a door to a wide parlor. To the right was the library. Antoine, after leaving Carl's hat and coat in a closet, moved that way and Carl followed him.

The library, according to the standards of this house, was a small and intimate room. To Carl it seemed large and over-furnished. It was crowded with grouped chairs and tables. There were rows of books, ceiling high, at the far end of the room on either side of a massive fireplace in which a fire was burning. Maida Ringling was in a chair near the fire. She stood up as Carl came in and laid aside the book she had been reading.

"That will be all, Antoine," she said to the butler.

She was wearing a long, red house gown which clung gently to the flowing lines of her slender body. She was tall, almost as tall as Carl, and she stood very straight. Carl moved into the room and took her hand and held it a moment, smiling. It was a cold hand and holding it like this was a mere formality.

"I hope I'm not too late," Carl murmured.

Maida shook her head. "I never like to go to bed until morning. Will you have a drink? There is whiskey and ice on the table."

"Later perhaps."

Maida sat down. She leaned back in her chair, looking at him. Her eyes were blue and direct and there was a faint smile on her lips, a faintly mocking smile. "Does the inquisition start right away?" she asked lightly.

Carl frowned. "Don't call it that."

"But this isn't just a friendly visit."

"Perhaps it is.'

Maida shook her head. "I saw you at the trial. I saw the way you looked at Ann Tobin. If I was the most beautiful woman in the world and we were alone on a desert island, you wouldn't glance at me twice. You would stand on the shore scanning the horizon for a glimpse of a certain girl whose nose isn't nearly so nice as mine and whose hair is just a dull brown."

"A warm brown," Carl grinned.

Maida shrugged her shoulders. "A warm brown, then. Why don't you fix a drink? Fix one for me, anyhow. Soda and ice in a tall glass and just a touch of whiskey to color it."

CARL got up and fixed the drink and one for himself. He glanced at the nose Madia was so proud of and at the blond hair combed up in tight, classical curls. Here was beauty, without any question, but it was a careful, groomed beauty, exquisite but almost unreal.

"You won't like what I have to tell you," Maida said, staring at her drink.

"Why not?"

"It isn't what you want to hear. I said in court that I was on the stairway when I heard the shot which killed my husband. That is true, but I was going upstairs, not coming down. Only a moment before I had been at the study door. I heard voices through it. My husband's voice and the voice of a girl, your Ann."

Carl shook his head. "You couldn't have heard her voice. She wasn't there."

"But she was."

"No. It was some other girl you heard."

"It was only a minute later, Carl, that Antoine reached the door and opened it. There wasn't time for someone to have left and for Ann to have arrived without seeing her."

"There was a minute. Maybe even a little more."

"But not time enough for someone to have gone from the study and not been seen by Ann if she was just arriving."

"Then the girl you heard was still in the room when Antoine opened the door and saw Ann."

"Impossible."

"There is a closet in the study, a bathroom and a bathroom window."

Maida frowned. "You won't be convinced, will you."

"Not of something that isn't true."

"You've not touched your drink."

Carl sampled his drink. He hadn't made it strong. It tasted like a flat, medicinal tonic. He stretched out his long legs and hooked one foot over another and scowled. "You might have killed him yourself," he said bluntly.

"I might have," said Maida, "but I had no reason to."

"You didn't love him."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Reasonably sure."

"Does it show that plainly?"

"No, but am I right?"

Carl was watching Maida's hands, watching the way they twisted together, watching each nervous movement they made. He sat staring into the fire, but staring into the fire he could see them, Maida's long, slender, white hands, betraying an emotion her face concealed.

"Carl, let me help you," Maida said suddenly, leaning forward. "I didn't tell what I had heard in court. I did that for you and Ann, at least. I can do more."

"How much more?" Carl asked bluntly.

"I could help you trap the man who killed my husband."

"So it is a man, now. A man you heard through the door?"

"Does it matter? It might have been a man, a man speaking in a high, excited voice."

"You said you would help me. Why?"

"Because I need help."

"In what way?"

Maida's hands were clenched now, clenched tightly at her side. They opened and closed and then opened and closed again.

"I'm afraid, Carl. Terribly afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

There was a sound from the doorway, the sound of a man clearing his throat, and then a voice saying, "What are you afraid of, darling? Not of me, surely."

Carl sat where he was. He didn't look around. He heard the man come into the room and he glanced at Maida and saw her come to her feet, her body stiff, rigid. He glanced over his shoulder, then, purposely taking his time in this, trying to force an appearance of easy, self-control. And he came slowly to his feet and nodded to the man who had just come in, nodded to Fred Wallace, who was supposed to be in love with Maida Ringling, and who, for that reason, might have wanted to see John Ringling dead.

Wallace came slowly forward. There was a smile on his darkly handsome face but there was no humor to it and the smile didn't reach his eyes, dark, sharp eyes that turned from Maida to Carl and back to Maida again.

"Nice and chummy, darling," he said, and there was a mocking note in his voice. "I can remember a few evenings like this, myself."

Maida's face showed no expression at all. "Fred, you're forgetting yourself," she said quietly.

"As you have forgotten me?"

HE WAS a thin man, tall, and his suit fitted him with a perfection Carl had never been able to achieve. A small, dark mustache marked the curve of his upper lip and his hair had a kinky wave. He looked like a man who belonged in the movies, Carl decided, the heavy lover type, coldly impetuous, romantically tragic, shrewdly dangerous.

"What do you want, Fred?" Maida asked.

"What you promised me, darling."

"I made you no promises."

Fred Wallace turned to the table and poured himself a drink. "Shall I remind you," he asked slowly. "Wasn't it here one evening that you said to me, *"Dearest, when I am free we will go there together. It will not be long to wait."* Yes, I think those were your exact words. I wonder if you knew what was going to happen to your husband?"

Carl looked at Maida. It had occurred to him earlier that her skin was like ivory, a warm, pink tinged ivory, but the color was gone from it now. Her face was pale, so pale that the rouge on her cheeks looked like rouge. Her lips were pressed tightly together, the wide line of them almost hidden.

"Will you leave, Fred, or shall I ring for the servants?" she asked bluntly. "Believe me, I will if it is necessary."

Wallace took his drink. He shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I shall go. I possibly owe you more than you owe me. For a time, darling, I even considered putting your husband out of the way. Fortunately, before I

could act, someone else did. Ann Tobin—or someone else."

Maida pointed to the door. Her eyes were blazing. "Get out!"

"I think you have my telephone number."

"Get out!" Maida said again.

Wallace glanced at Carl. "Come and see me sometime, Lindholm," he suggested. "There are things we could talk over, things I didn't mention when we talked before."

"I'll be around," Carl Lindholm answered.

Wallace turned and moved to the door. He stopped when he got there and looked back. "See you soon, darling," he called to Maida. "And make it very soon."

Maida Ringling gave him no answer. She stood by her chair, stiff and straight, then as Carl heard the front door open and close she sank back into the chair and covered her face with her hands.

SHE was crying, crying without making hardly a sound. Carl stared at her. He didn't know what to do. He thought that he ought to leave but he didn't want to leave for a while. He sat down in his chair and stared into the fire. He lit a cigarette. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Maida lower her hands and look at him.

"I've been an awful fool, Carl," she said after a moment. "A terrible fool."

Carl went on staring into the fire.

"We were going to be divorced," Maida went on. "And I did say what Fred said I did. But that was long ago, just after I met him, before I knew what he was like. You believe me, don't you?"

Carl still didn't speak. What was true and what was false? They would lie to him, Gary Ingerman had said, and some lies would be unimportant, would be made to close him out from some secret which had nothing at all to do with John Ringling's death.

"Carl, don't you believe me?"

"Before Wallace came in," Carl said slowly, "you were offering to help me. How, Maida?"

"You don't think Ann Tobin killed my husband."

"I know she didn't."

"Carl, if she didn't, I know who did."

"Who, Maida?"

"He did. Fred Wallace. He meant to. You heard him admit it. You heard what he said."

"And what about the voice you heard through the door, Maida?"

"It could have been a man's voice. It was high, excited."

Carl stood up. He said, "Maida, who knew that you and your husband were considering a divorce?"

"Henry Price, my husband's partner."

"How did Wallace get in tonight? Does he have a key?"

"Of course not. Antoine must not have pushed the door tight. It closes hard."

True or false? Carl Lindholm stared down at this woman who might know so much that would help him, or who might know nothing at all. Tears streaked her face but didn't mar her beauty. There was a wide, almost appealing expression in her eyes. She didn't seem cold or distant now. She seemed little and helpless and lost and perhaps even frightened. She put up a hand to him. "Please, Carl? Please let me help."

It occurred to Carl that he could pull her up, pull her into his arms, and this realization stirred a sudden excitement in his blood and closed in on his chest making him breathe faster. Her lips were parted. They looked warm, moist. For an instant Carl held her hand, then he dropped it, smiled, and stepped back. "I'll call you up," he promised.

"Soon, Carl."

"Soon."

There was an expression now in Maida's eyes which he couldn't fathom. Disappointment, regret, a faint anger, he didn't know. Still smiling he turned away and walked to the door.

He got his hat and coat and let himself out, noticing that the door did close a little hard but not too hard. The wind from the ocean had brought in a fog, but not too thick a fog. Carl walked out to the street. He had half-expected that Wallace would be waiting for him but he saw no sign of the man. Neither did he see the man who had been following him. At the corner he caught a street car and on Fulton he transferred to another line which took him home. It was after midnight, now, and he considered telephoning Gary but decided against it. Gary would be asleep.

III

THE telephone woke him. He sat up and answered it, still foggy with sleep. There was no reply on the other end of the wire. He said, "Hello, hello there," and listened. A faint click reached his ears as whoever telephoned hung up without speaking.

Carl scowled at the 'phone. This had happened yesterday morning and the morning before. He scowled and then grinned and put the telephone back on the bed stand. "Psychological warfare," he said aloud. "O.S.S. stuff. To hell with you."

He looked at his watch. It was almost nine. He had slept late, later than usual, and he got up now and shaved and took a shower and dressed. This wasn't much of a room that he had but it did have a private bath and a telephone and he was pretty lucky to have found it after his discharge from the army. Places to live had been hard to find after V-J Day. Places to live were still hard to find.

There was a car parked across the street. A man was sitting back of the wheel, reading a newspaper. Carl saw this through the window. He wondered if the man in the car was his shadow for the day. He didn't see anyone else loitering around on the street.

There was a restaurant two blocks away. Carl went there for breakfast. When he came out he saw the car which had been parked across from his room. It was now parked down the street a ways. He took a street car to town. The car he had spotted, followed the street car.

Henry Price had an office in a building on Market Street. This had been John Ringling's office, too, but Ringling's name was no longer on the door. The woman who presided over the waiting room gave Carl a disinterested glance as he came in. "You want to see Mr. Price again?" she asked.

Carl nodded.

"He is due in court in a few minutes. You'll not be long."

"Not long," Carl promised.

The woman went into Price's private office and came back a moment later and nodded to Carl. She held the door open for him.

Henry Price sat at his desk glancing through some papers. He was bald, about sixty, and had a thin, bony face. His eyes were dark and sharp and he gave Carl an impression of nervousness. His hands were never still. He talked fast, almost firing his words out of his mouth.

"I have very little time," he said shortly. "What do you want this morning?"

"Just the answer to another question," Carl replied. "Were Mr. and Mrs. Ringling going to be divorced?"

Price laid down the papers he was holding. "I don't see how a thing like that can possibly be of concern to you."

"But it is."

"In what way?"

Carl frowned. "It was Mrs. Ringling who told me that she and her husband were planning a divorce. She said that you would verify it."

"Then of course, I will."

"You mean that what Mrs. Ringling said was true?"

The attorney smiled. "I am too old a man and too wise a man, Lindholm, to call a woman a liar if there isn't a good point in doing so."

"You are saying, then, that they were not planning a divorce."

"I'm saying they were." The attorney's voice had sharpened. "And I'm telling you again that this persistent prying into people's lives will only bring you trouble. It was the Tobin girl who killed John Ringling. The evidence was conclusive. Who else had a stronger motive? Lindholm, you can't duck that or the way she was caught with the gun still warm in her hand."

Carl shook his head. "She didn't kill him."

"She did, and if you want to get into serious trouble yourself, keep right on playing Dick Tracy. I'd appreciate it if you didn't bother me again."

True or false? There it was again. Had Henry Price lied in verifying what Maida Ringling had said, or had a divorce really been planned? He was sitting on the Library steps. He had come here from Price's office, come here rather aimlessly with the man who was following him, still following. It was warm and sunny here and he went over everything Price had said and abruptly he was thinking of the motive. A strong motive, Price had indicated, but was it strong? Was it even a motive at all?

"Miss Tobin," the district attorney had said, "Edith Tobin was your sister, wasn't she?"

Ann Tobin had nodded.

"As I understand it," said the district attorney, "Edith Tobin was John Ringling's first wife. They were married in Denver, in 1934."

"Yes."

"In 1936, according to the records I have, Edith Tobin Ringling, your sister, died of an overdose of sleeping tablets. There was an inquest. I believe you were there."

Ann Tobin had nodded.

"You accused John Ringling of murdering your sister. I believe you were quite definite. You said, according to the record, 'I'LL KILL YOU. I'LL KILL YOU IF I HAVE TO FOLLOW YOU TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.' "

"I was hysterical," Ann said, low-voiced. "I was upset by my sister's death. I was wrong in accusing John Ringling, terribly wrong. I learned that later when I received a letter from my sister, a letter written just before she took the overdose of sleeping tablets."

"You have that letter, I presume."

"No, it has been lost."

"Then you didn't come to San Francisco just because John Ringling had come here. You didn't follow him to make good your threat to kill him.

"When you bought the gun you didn't say to the man who sold it to you, 'THIS IS FOR A RAT WHO HAS LIVED TEN YEARS TOO LONG.' "

"No, I didn't buy any gun."

"But you did, Miss Tobin."

"I didn't."

"You hated John Ringling for ten years."

"I didn't."

"You threatened to kill him if you had to follow him to the end of the earth."

"But I was hysterical when I said that. I didn't mean it, I admired him from the time I met him when I was a witness in a trial. I even introduced him to my sister."

"You didn't follow him here."

"I didn't even know he was in San Francisco until I received a telephone call from him asking me to come and see him, and then a letter, making the appointment."

This letter was one which wasn't lost. It had been printed in the papers and Carl knew it by heart. It read:

> Dear Ann:
>
> Can you make it Thursday night at eight-thirty? Come to my home. I will be in the study and will let you in by the study door which is just a little to the left of the front door. You will have no trouble finding it. We will talk everything over then. John Ringling.

What did it mean, *we will talk everything over then?* The prosecution had made a lot of that sentence, had hinted at attempted blackmail. But according to Ann, the sentence had merely referred to old times, to the days back in Denver when they had known each other and when Ringling had been married to Ann's sister.

The man who had followed Carl here was standing at the corner, holding up a lamppost. He wasn't the same man who had followed Carl the day before. He was short, almost chunky. Carl stared toward him and suddenly got to his feet and started that way. The man didn't even look interested. He didn't even seem interested when Carl stopped and asked him for a match.

"Nice day, isn't it?" he said casually.

Carl nodded. "A nice day, but don't get too close to me, Mister, or it might be the last nice day you'll ever know."

The man blinked. He had watery eyes and a red, bulbous nose. "It's a free country," he declared. "I'll go where I want to."

"Who hired you to follow me?"

"Huh?" asked the man. "Are you batty?"

"Maybe. Who hired you?"

"Look here," said the man, "I don't know what you're talking about. To hell with you. Leave me alone."

"I will," Carl said slowly, "while it's light. But, Mister, when it gets dark, watch out. When you or your partner is following me around some dark corner, be careful that I'm not waiting for you. Be awfully careful."

The man backed away. He blinked his eyes again, moistened lips. "I still think you're batty," he declared. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Want me to show you?"

The man took another step backwards. He looked nervously from side to side. Carl

stared at him for a moment, then walked on but when he glanced back the man was still following him.

CARL telephoned Gary Ingerman, told her he couldn't make it for lunch, that he would call her later, and then crossed over to the Royal Oaks apartment. Sara Condit lived here, Sara Condit, whose name had been on John Ringling's calendar for an appointment on the night of his death. *"Will call tonight,"* had been written on the calendar after her name. For that reason the police had been casually interested in her in spite of Ann Tobin's arrest. And for that reason, Carl was interested in her.

Sara Condit hadn't appeared at the trial, nor had the mysterious Nick Van Hefflin, to whom she was supposed to be engaged. The police had discovered that John Ringling had been "interested" in Sara Condit, and that she and Ringling had been "just good friends." The appointment the night of Ringling's death, according to Sara, hadn't been an appointment, but a promise to telephone. Sara Condit had been with Nick Van Hefflin at the time of the murder, had been here at home getting ready to go out to a dance.

Some of this Carl had learned from Gary Ingerman, some from Detective Meyers, and some from Sara and Nick Van Hefflin, who had been a little touchy about answering any questions at all. It was Detective Meyers who had said that Sara and Nick were involved in a scheme to take Ringling for as many thousand as they could. What proof the detective had, Carl didn't know.

On this warm day the apartment house door had been propped open and Carl had no trouble getting inside. He took the automatic elevator to the third floor and rang the bell at the door of Sara's apartment. Sara answered it and when she saw who was there she tried to close the door but Carl's foot was in the way and he pushed on it.

The girl backed away. She was about thirty. She had nicely tanned skin, flashing dark eyes and brown hair. The gown she was wearing had been designed to reveal every line of her figure and she had a good deal to reveal.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "I have nothing more to tell you. I wish you would leave me alone."

She was an actress, Gary had said. She did bits on several radio programs. She had come here from Hollywood.

"I just want to talk to you again," Carl said slowly.

"I had nothing to do with what happened to Mr. Ringling or to that girl you're so wild about. There isn't a thing I can tell you."

"But you could tell me this. Could you flatten your hair close against your head, wear a blond wig, and get away with it?"

"Could I what?"

"Could you wear a blond wig over your hair naturally enough to fool a man?"

"If he didn't get too close."

"Say across a counter in a dingy shop on a dark day."

"It would be a cinch."

"Then a woman with blond hair could wear a dark wig."

Sara frowned. "Say, what are you driving at?"

"There's one weak spot in the case against Ann Tobin," Carl said slowly. "She said she hadn't bought the gun which was used to kill John Ringling. I believe her. I believe someone else, someone made up to look like Ann went into the hock shop owned by Joseph Stoner and bought that gun and gave Ann's name."

Sara Condit was still frowning. "All right, maybe she did but what's that got to do with me?"

Carl Lindholm shrugged. He had thought an approach like this might capture Sara's interest, but apparently he had been wrong.

"How much did you get out of Ringling?" he asked bluntly.

"Nothing. He was just a friend of mine. An old friend. I don't have to take this. If Nick were here—"

"But Nick's not here," Carl broke in. "Tell me what happened. Maybe Ringling was tougher than you thought he would be. Maybe he refused to pay off. Maybe he even threatened to turn you and Nick over to the police. I wonder if that's what happened."

"Will you get out?"

Carl shook his head. "Until I've found the person who killed Ringling and Ann Tobin is out of jail, I'll never stop." Carl was speaking slowly now, speaking earnestly. "I've made a list of names. There are only four or five names on the list now.

Maybe there will never be more. Some day there may be a hundred. Your name is on that list, and Nick's, and before I'm through there isn't much about either of you that I won't know. There isn't a secret in your life I won't drag out into the open."

Sara moistened her lips. She edged over to the desk, jerked open a drawer and pulled out a gun. She pointed it at Carl. "Get out. Get out now," she said sharply.

Carl turned toward the door. He looked back. "You'll not always be able to choke me off like this," he said quietly. "I'll be at the radio station, on the street, at the night clubs you go to. We'll have our talk yet, Sara, and you'll answer my questions. Until I know you had nothing to do with Ringling's death, you'll never be free from me."

Sara Condit didn't say a word. The hand holding the gun was very steady, steady enough to have held a gun to John Ringling's head. Carl opened the door and stepped outside. He closed the door and stood there in the hallway for a moment. He could hear the sound of a telephone dial and then the muffled tones of Sara's voice. He couldn't hear what she was saying.

This was what he had to do, he told himself. Stir people up, get them excited, drive at them until one of them broke and he could see the opening through which Ann could be free.

He took the elevator down and moved out to the street and walked back toward Market. Behind him, about half a block, the man with the watery eyes followed.

IV

THE girl in the outer office told Carl he could go in now and Carl got up and walked in to face Sam McCaffery. This was supposed to be an importing office, but from all Carl had heard the importing end of the business was just a front. McCaffery had been born south of Market, had grown up with the Mission gangs, had spent what might have been his high-school years in reform school, and somewhere along the way had learned it was much wiser to help others break the law than break it himself, help others and rake in a good percentage for his help.

McCaffery was a big man, so big he was almost fat. He had wide, thick shoulders and massive arms. His face was fleshy, his eyes almost hidden under dark, bushy brows. It was hard to tell where his chin ended and his neck began. He was sitting back of his desk when Carl came into the room, sitting in an armchair which seemed to enclose his body so tightly it didn't look as though he could get up without lifting the chair with him. He stared at Carl and Carl had no idea what the man was thinking. There was too much flesh on McCaffery's face for an emotion to have much of a chance of expression.

Carl took a chair at the side of the desk. He had been here before and had apparently accomplished nothing. He didn't know where to start today. You couldn't threaten a man like McCaffery who had lived most of his life outside the law and who probably had enough contacts to line up any kind of a gang he might need. You couldn't bluff a man like McCaffery who had gambled since his youth. You couldn't frighten a man like McCaffery.

"What is it this time?" McCaffery asked bluntly. "I told you not to come back. I told you I didn't know a thing about Ringling's death and I meant it."

"You would have told me that if you had killed him," Carl answered. "How do I know you meant what you said?"

McCaffery leaned forward. "I told the girl to send you in because you interest me. I like anyone who is fool enough to stand up for what he believes in. Years ago I knew a detective named Olsen. He had one fool ambition. He wanted to put me behind bars for keeps. I tried every way in the world to reach him. I couldn't do it. I couldn't reach him with money, with women, with a chance to be made chief. The guy was so damned honest and had such a one-track mind he was impossible."

"Could you reach him with bullets?" Carl asked dryly.

"You know, a two-bit hold-up man knocked him off one night, a man I had never heard of. I was actually sorry. It was as though I had lost a friend. I went to his funeral. What about this girl of yours? You getting any place?"

"I will before I'm through. You see, I know her, McCaffery. I know her like you knew this detective named Olsen. I know she didn't kill Ringling. That makes it simple. Someone else did. All I've got to do is find this someone else."

"Who are you working on? "

"At this minute I'm interested in a man named Sam McCaffery."

Mark McCaffery off your list."

"You hated Ringling, didn't you?"

"Sure I did. He was a clever shyster, good on every surface of his life but rotten all the way through.

"YOU could have framed the murder. You've got the contacts."

"Maybe I have, but I didn't."

"You're still the most logical person on the list. You could have worked the gun deal. I tell you, Ann didn't buy that gun."

"Then go to work on that."

"I mean to."

"Who else is on your list?"

"Ringling's wife."

"A beautiful chunk of ice but I hardly know her."

"Fred Wallace."

"I don't know him, either."

"Sara Condit and Nick Van Hefflin."

"Small-time stuff from the south, dangerous if cornered but hardly up to anything first class and if you figure it right, this was first class. Who else?"

"Henry Price."

"Another shyster. Work on him."

"In fact, work on anyone but Sam McCaffery, huh."

"That's about the size of it."

Carl Lindholm shook his head. He got to his feet. "You're big, McCaffery," he said slowly. "And you might be hard to get to but if you're the man I'm after, I'll get here."

McCaffery scowled. It was a scowl which seemed to have a hard time in getting to the surface of his face, but when once there, settled in and grew ugly.

"I told you to mark me off your list," he said heavily. "Don't start snooping around and asking questions about Sam McCaffery or you'll get smeared all over one of these hills. If you had anything on me we could make a game of it, but you don't, so leave me alone. Get it?"

Carl shook his head. "I don't hear well." He turned to the door and from the door, looked back. Sam McCaffery was still scowling.

IT WAS late afternoon but was still warm. Carl Lindholm stood on the corner of Market and Powell, stood there against a building remembering McCaffery's scowl, the gun in Sara Condit's hand, the sharp sound of the voice of Henry Price, the sudden appearance of Fred Wallace in the Ringling home and Maida Ringling's offer of help. There were throngs of people on the street but he was unaware of them. Not far away was the man with the watery, blinking eyes who had been following him all day, but Carl hadn't even glanced at him.

Any of those he had seen could have killed John Ringling, he told himself. Any of them could have planned things so that Ann Tobin would have been blamed. Someone had bought a gun, someone who looked like Ann, who had given Ann's name. There, in the purchase of the gun, was a point in the case against Ann Tobin where he had to drive in hard. In the last analysis, the testimony given by Joseph Stoner, who had sold the gun, had to be broken down. It had been damning testimony. After Stoner had finished, Ann hadn't had a chance.

"Mr. Stoner," the district attorney had said, "will you tell the court in your own words what happened in your shop late on the afternoon of March 11th?"

Joseph Stoner had gulped and had cleared his throat. He was a little man, bald, about fifty, and he wore thick glasses. "I sold a gun," he said slowly. "It was about four-thirty when a girl came in. She was nervous. She kept looking back at the door all the time she was in the shop. At first she just looked in the showcases and asked the prices of a couple of things but didn't want to see them. Then she came right out and asked for a gun, a small gun. I showed her one and showed her how it worked and she bought it, paid cash without a question. When I asked for her name she hesitated like she didn't want to give it. Then she told me what her name was."

"What name did she give?" the district attorney interrupted.

"Ann Tobin."

"Did you make her verify it?"

Stoner nodded. "I thought maybe she had lied about her name. I asked her for some identification. She opened her purse and showed me some letters addressed to her."

"Addressed to Ann Tobin?"

"Yes."

"Did she say anything more before she left?"

"Yes, she sort of laughed and said, 'THIS IS FOR A RAT WHO HAS LIVED TEN YEARS TOO LONG.' "

"Didn't that surprise you?"

Stoner nodded. "She hurried out but I was worried. I wished I hadn't sold her the gun. I kept watching the newspapers for a while, expecting to see her name. I thought of telling the police but I didn't."

"You saw her features quite well while she was in your shop?"

"Yes."

"Would you recognize her if you saw her again?"

Stoner nodded.

"Is she in this courtroom?"

"She is right over there." Stoner stood up as he said this and pointed straight at Ann Tobin.

THIS had been perhaps the most dramatic moment during the trial. Carl didn't think he would ever forget it, forget the breathless hush in the courtroom or the way everyone looked at Ann. And he was proud of the way she had taken it, with her head up and her shoulders squared. She didn't cower back as though guilty. She didn't faint or lose her head and scream an angry denial. She just sat there and looked back at Stoner and shook her head. She said to her attorney, "He's lying. I never saw him before in my life. I was never in his shop. On the eleventh of March I was home in bed, ill." But Ann couldn't prove she was home in bed, ill.

There had been more to Stoner's testimony. The defense had tried to shake his story, but couldn't, had questioned his vision and the light in his shop on a late and foggy afternoon, but to no avail. Stoner was positive in his identification of Ann Tobin. He wouldn't back up an inch.

Carl had been to see Stoner several times. He had seen him in his shop and had called on him once in the flat where he lived with his nephew, who helped him in his shop. He had talked to Stoner, questioned him, had done everything he could to find some loophole in the man's story, and had got exactly nowhere. But Stoner was one of the key points in this job he was working on and Stoner should be next on his list, today.

Carl turned and headed up the street. He came to Stoner's shop and stood outside for a moment, frowning at the door. Through that door on March the 11th had gone a girl with brown hair, a girl made up to look like Ann Tobin, a girl who had used Ann Tobin's name. As far back as March 11th this thing had been planned. The arrest of Ann Tobin had been no accident. Ann had been carefully selected for the role she was now playing.

The thin-faced nephew of Joseph Stoner was watching Carl through the glass of the door and as Carl came in he backed away. He looked a little frightened but he had always looked that way. He looked as though he expected to be jumped any minute for having done something wrong. He was a smaller man than Stoner, hollow-chested. His tight, yellowish skin seemed to be pasted to the bones of his face. His name was Schmidt. Carl had never heard his first name. He had talked to Schmidt but had received from him only a verification of everything Stoner had said.

Carl looked around the shop but didn't see Stoner. He nodded to Schmidt and said, "Where's Stoner? I want to see him for a minute."

"He's gone," Schmidt answered. "He went off just a few minutes ago with someone in a car."

"Went where?"

"He said out to the flat. He said he wouldn't come back and he told me to lock up."

Anything about Stoner held its interest for Carl Lindholdm and this variation from Stoner's routine brought the frown again to his face.

"What did he go out there for?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't know."

"Who took him?"

"I don't know, Mr. Lindholm."

"Why don't you?"

"I was working in the back of the shop. My uncle was up front, at the door where he often stands. A car stopped outside and honked and my uncle went out for a minute and then came back and got his hat and coat. He said he was going out to the flat and that he wouldn't be back again."

"What kind of a car was it?"

"It was a black car. I don't know what make."

"Who was driving it? A man or woman?"

"I don't know."

It had been a black car last night which had almost run him down. Carl didn't know why he should suddenly remember that. There were hundreds of black cars in town, thousands. He shook his head.

"Now that your uncle's not around, Schmidt," he said gruffly, "what can you tell me about the girl who bought that gun?"

"I—nothing, Mr. Lindholm."

"Had you ever seen her before? Did you ever see her afterwards?"

"I—saw her in court. Ann Tobin. I'm sorry, Mr. Lindholm."

Carl turned abruptly away. He crossed the street and caught a street car and at Mason transferred to another. Half an hour later he stood on the sidewalk outside of the flat in which Joseph Stoner lived. There was no car parked in front of the flat or anywhere near. Carl walked up to the door and rang the bell and then knocked. He could hear nothing from inside the flat. He rang the bell again and then again but no one opened the door. After a momentary hesitation he tried the knob and pushed. The door wasn't locked.

Carl opened the door several inches. "Stoner!" he called. "Hey, Stoner."

There was no answer. Carl pushed the door wider. He stepped inside and just inside he stopped, rigid, his breath sticking in his throat. Joseph Stoner was here. He was lying on his face on the floor in front of a red plush davenport. A deep red stain which matched the color of the davenport had soaked into the carpet around his head. His body was motionless. The minute he saw him, Carl knew that Stoner was dead.

So here was the end of the trail, here in this quiet flat. Stoner, whose identification of Ann Tobin had cinched the case against her, was dead. He could never change what he had said. Here was the end of the trail—or perhaps the beginning. Carl mopped a hand over his face. Yes, this might be the beginning. Maybe Stoner had been killed because he knew the woman who had bought the gun, knew she wasn't Ann Tobin. Maybe Stoner had been killed so he wouldn't talk. There was a chance this could be tied up with Ann's trial and the testimony Stoner had given, a narrow chance, perhaps, but still a chance.

Carl closed the door. He took a quick look through this room and through the other rooms in the flat but there was no one here. He came back to the front room. On the coffee table near where Stoner was lying was a bottle of wine and two glasses. One glass was full, the other empty. Carl noticed the position of Stoner's body and the chair facing the davenport and close to the coffee table. The murderer, he decided, had sat in that chair, Stoner had been on the davenport. The murderer had sat there and coolly fired a shot into Stoner's brain. Maybe Stoner had started to get up when he saw the gun, had started to get up and had fallen to the floor.

Carl looked around for the gun but didn't find it. He examined the chair where the murderer might have sat. It was just a chair. He looked for ashtrays but there were no ashtrays in the room. The sound of a distant siren reached his ears. The sound grew louder and louder. Carl moved over to the window. A police car, screaming down the

block, pulled in to the curb, just outside. Several men piled out of it. There was no chance to get away now. Carl Lindholm stood where he was, waiting.

V

THIS was jail. It was a place of nauseating odors and of a penetrating cold from which you couldn't escape. It was a place of harsh, grating noises, and of shadows which were only thinned by the light of day. There was a floor of cement, three walls of cement, a ceiling of cement.

There was one wall of bars and a barred door and a bunk too hard to sleep on. There was food twice a day, food that had no palatable taste.

Two guards stopped in front of Carl's cell. They unlocked and opened the door and watched him narrowly as though they expected him to cause trouble. "Come along," one of them ordered. "Meyers wants to see you again."

This was probably the tenth time Meyers had sent for him. Sometimes his interviews with the detective had run for several hours, sometimes only a few minutes. Sometimes Meyers had questioned him alone, sometimes there had been half a dozen other detectives to take part in the inquisition. Carl wondered what it would be this time. He nodded to the guards and stepped into the narrow corridor.

Meyers was waiting in one of the interviewing rooms, a bare room furnished with only a table and a few chairs. Meyers was a big man, bulky, red-faced. Carl had never seen him when he wasn't scowling, and he was scowling today. He had dark eyes, a nose that was too flat, and thick, dry lips. His hair was beginning to gray.

"Ready to talk yet?" Meyers asked as he came in.

"I'm always ready to talk," Carl answered.

"If it's more of the same I don't want to hear it."

"It will be more of the same."

Meyers was sitting in one of the chairs near the table. "You name is Carl Lindholm," he said slowly. "You were born in Minnesota and were brought to California by your parents when you were quite young. You went to school here and to Stanford University. You were drafted and served in the army overseas and were discharged shortly after V-J Day. You went to work at a good job with Benetor. You met and fell in love with a girl named Ann Tobin. When she was arrested and convicted of murder you threw up your job and set out to prove she was innocent. You started bothering people. You didn't get any place because there wasn't any place to get. You finally lost your head when you were talking to Joseph Stoner and in a fit of temper, killed him."

"All true but the last," Carl agreed. "Stoner was dead when I got there."

"What did you do with the gun you used to kill him?"

"I didn't have a gun."

Meyers grunted. He stared at the floor. "Suppose we let you go," he said suddenly. "What will you do? Will you go back to work and behave yourself."

Carl shook his head. "Ann Tobin didn't kill Ringling and Stoner knew it. That's why Stoner was killed."

"Ann Tobin didn't kill Ringling," Meyers repeated. "Ann Tobin didn't kill Ringling. Don't you ever get tired of saying that or do you keep saying it to try to prove it to yourself?"

"I keep saying it because it's true, and because someone doesn't want to hear me saying it. Someone who is guilty."

"Nuts!"

"Ann Tobin didn't kill John Ringling."

Meyers jerked to his feet. He glared at Carl, then took a turn around the room and stopped and faced Carl again.

"We're letting you out of here," he said bluntly. "We're letting you out of here but we'll have you back damned quick if you keep on bothering people. Understand?"

"Then I'll be back."

Meyers' hands opened and closed. He said, "Lindholm, maybe you didn't kill Stoner. You didn't have a gun on you when you were arrested, you didn't have time to hide it and we haven't found it. We would look a little silly in court trying to prove you shot Stoner with a gun that didn't exist. But just because we're letting you go doesn't mean we're finished with you, not by a long ways. Just keep that in mind, will you. Worry about it a little."

"I'll not worry."

"You'd better. Come on, we'll get your stuff and you can go."

HE HAD been in jail three days and now he was out. He had been in jail three days and had hardly been able to stand it. Ann Tobin had been in jail for a month before her trial and for a month during it. She was in jail now, or in prison and there could be little difference. If it had been hard on him Carl couldn't bear it to think how much harder it must be on Ann. He stood in the sunshine, a free man again, remembering his last visit with Ann. She had been thinner than in the days before her arrest and her face showed traces of the strain she had been under. But she had still smiled at him.

"How is it, Ann?" he had asked her.

"Not bad, Carl. Not bad at all. They are good to me, the matron and the guards, as good as they can be, I suppose. How are things at the office?"

"All right."

"You'll get ahead, Carl. You'll get ahead fast. You'll go as far as you want to."

"Maybe."

"You will, Carl. Promise me you will."

He had nodded his head, suddenly unable to talk, unable to see Ann's face through the film of tears in his eyes. And he had just sat there for a while, facing her through a heavy wire grille, having a thousand things to say to her but unable to get any words past the lump in his throat, unable to speak at all.

Carl turned and started walking up the street. He put this memory of Ann out of his mind. There was work to do and it was time he got busy at it. Gary Ingerman was the first person he ought to see. Gary would know about the police investigation into Stoner's death. Carl had asked Meyers what the police had learned but Meyers wouldn't talk to him.

THEY had dinner again at Gary's apartment rather than go out and buck the crowds at the restaurants and afterwards Carl looked out the window. There was no man standing in the shadowy doorway across the street. No one had followed him here.

"You look thin, Carl," Gary said to him. "You're not eating enough. You're letting this thing get you down."

Carl shook his head. "A man couldn't eat more than I did tonight. Quit worrying about me. Tell me about Stoner."

"The police are stumped. If they had found the gun you wouldn't be here, but they couldn't find a gun."

"How did they learn about the murder?"

"A woman in the next flat heard the shot. She telephoned them and just after she telephoned she saw a car driving away from in front of Stoner's door. She didn't get to the window in time to see who was driving the car."

"Did she see me arrive?"

"No, she must have been on the telephone again, calling her husband. She was quite excited. Afraid."

"Did anyone else see me arrive or see the car?"

"No one the police located. They are working now on the theory that Stoner was fencing stolen goods and that some criminal he gyped must have killed him. I had a talk with Meyers and as a routine matter he tried to tie Stoner's death up with what happened to Ringling. At the time Stoner was killed Price was on the way from court to his office. Nick Van Hefflin and Sara Condit were at a cocktail bar near where Sara lives. Fred Wallace says he was at the Palace bar, alone. No proof. Maida Ringling says she was home and the servants agree, but they would anyhow. Meyers didn't bother Sam McCaffery but McCaffery would never murder anyone himself. He would hire his murderer and pick someone he could be sure of."

Carl nodded. None of this helped very much. He stared at Gary Ingerman who was sitting on the davenport again with her feet tucked up under her just as she had sat a few evenings before. There was a frowning, thoughtful look on Gary's face. Her eyes met his and then turned away.

"I'm not being much help, am I?" she said slowly. "I wish I could tell you something different, Carl. I wish I could say I knew the answers."

"We are overlooking something," Carl muttered. "Something important. The answer is there. Stoner was killed because he knew it, or at least, knew who bought the gun. Whoever killed him took an awful chance, called for him, took him home, shot him and left."

"Look at them one by one, Carl."

"All right, take Maida Ringling. Maybe she wanted a divorce, but Ringling would have fought it. His death set her free and left her wealthy. She was on the scene, could have killed him. She could have known Ann was calling and who Ann was. She could have worn a brown wig and bought the gun. Stoner could have guessed who she was at the trial. She could have killed him. The servants, out of loyalty to her, might have given her an alibi."

"Henry Price?"

"Motive as yet unknown, but he was Ringling's partner and in the partnership association we might find the motive. He would have had to get a girl to buy the gun for him. It might have been possible. He could have picked up Stoner on the way from court to the office."

"Fred Wallace?"

"Motive, his love for Maida and desire to see her free, or his love for the money he could get through her. Someone would have had to buy the gun for him. He could have learned of Ann's visit to Ringling through Ringling or Maida. He could have killed Ringling and escaped through the bathroom window after Ann arrived. He could have killed Stoner."

"In fact, Stoner's entire story could have been a lie. A man might have bought the gun."

"That's right."

"What about Nick Van Hefflin and Sara Condit?"

"Sara could have bought the gun, could have learned of Ann through Ringling. She and Van Hefflin were trying to blackmail Ringling but he wouldn't stand for it and threatened them with the police."

"Possible, Carl. But only possible. What about McCaffery?"

"He had the motive and he has the organization to work anything necessary. It could very well be McCaffery."

"It could be any of them."

"Yes, any of them, and the list is still open."

"We may have a long way to go."

Carl shrugged his shoulders. He said, "Gary, what kind of a man was Ringling? Would you have called him a shyster? Was he interested in women? Was he honest?"

"He was a clever attorney, shrewd, almost too shrewd. He handled the defense for Roger Burns, a case which closed just a little while before his death. I interviewed him with regard to the jury's decision and for what might have been called a human-interest story. He was easy to talk to, charming, but I had an uneasy feeling all the time I was with him. His eyes were a little too searching. I don't know much about him and didn't want to know more. Does that help any?"

"I don't know."

"Carl, who do you think killed Ringling? Which one is your choice?"

"I'm not ready to make a choice."

"But if you had to."

"If I had to—Maida Ringling. I'm going to see her again. Tomorrow. She asked me to call her. She named the murderer. She named Fred Wallace. I'm going to play it that way for a while."

"From what you told me I'd guess she was tired of Wallace and wanted to get rid of him. Be careful how she uses you, Carl."

"I'll be careful."

"You're not going anywhere tonight?"

"No."

"Carl, do you remember Minnesota?"

"Vaguely."

"Tell me about it? What did you do as a boy? Where did you live? What do you remember? Do you know why I'm asking?"

Carl shook his head, puzzled.

"I'm asking to change the subject. You'll never be able to do any straight thinking if you don't get away from Ann for a while—Ann, and Ringling, and Maida and the rest of them. So just lean back and make yourself comfortable, close your eyes and start remembering. What did you do when you played hookey from school? What about the fight with the neighbor kid. Get started, Carl. That's an order from Gary Ingerman, psychiatrist."

Carl grinned. He leaned back and closed his eyes. The chair was comfortable, comfortable enough to sleep in. He wished, suddenly, that he had known Gary a long time ago. He hadn't met her until just before Ann's trial. He wondered how old she was and what her life had been like and why she hadn't ever married. He could not understand that, couldn't understand why she wasn't married.

"You're not to sleep," Gary reminded him. "Talk, Carl. Talk about anything."

Carl opened his eyes and looked at Gary and laughed. He started talking about what he could remember of his boyhood in Minnesota. He hadn't thought back to those days for a long time. It was surprising, all he could remember. It was a good evening.

IT WAS late when he went home. No one followed him. He went several places, stopped several times to make sure, but no one was following him. When he reached his room he got ready for bed and just as he was about to turn out the light the telephone rang. He answered it but there was no reply from the other end of the wire. He said hello several times, then heard the click as the line went dead.

"So that's started again," he said under his breath. "To hell with whoever is calling me."

It was very still in the room. Carl clicked out the light. He raised the blinds and opened the windows and got in bed, but he couldn't sleep. He had felt good when he came here, good with the lift of a pleasant evening, but that feeling was gone, had been swept away by a telephone call from someone who wouldn't talk.

The telephone rang again. It rang several times. He finally reached for it and barked, "What do you want? You can talk, can't you?"

There was a moment's silence, then he heard Gary's voice in his ear. "Why, Carl, what's the matter? Were you asleep? I shouldn't have called so late, I know."

"Gary," he cried. "Gary, I didn't mean that. I'm sorry."

"What's the matter, Carl?"

"I was almost asleep, I guess."

"I shouldn't have called so late," Gary said slowly. "I just couldn't get to sleep. I was worried about you, I guess. I wanted to be sure you got home all right."

Carl grinned in the darkness. "I got home all right. I'm glad you called. It's nice to have someone worry about you."

"I can see the moon from my bed, Carl."

"So can I," Carl replied. This wasn't true, but it was a nice thought.

"Good night." Gary's voice was almost a whisper.

"Good night, Gary," Carl answered.

He hung up the telephone and lay in bed smiling and feeling good again and suddenly his smile vanished and he sat upright and swung his feet to the floor. "Gary—" he said under his breath. It could have been Gary," and a cold chill raced up and down his spine. Gary had known them both. She had known Ringling and Ann. She was about Ann's size and could have fixed her hair like Ann's when she bought the gun. No one had checked her movements on the afternoon when Stoner was killed.

Carl reached for a cigarette and lit it and then he laughed and shook his head. Of course it could have been Gary, but it could have been a thousand other brown-haired girls, too. And why would Gary want Ringling dead or want Ann to suffer for the crime? What was the matter with him anyhow? He would be suspecting himself pretty soon.

He finished his cigarette, snuffed it out, lay back in his bed and almost immediately went to sleep.

VI

MAIDA suggested lunch and she met him at one o'clock at a small tearoom near Coit Tower. The tearoom wasn't crowded and they had a table near a window overlooking the bay. Maida was wearing a dark suit and a small dark hat in sharp contrast to her blond hair. She looked very beautiful.

They didn't talk much during lunch and Maida ate hardly a thing. She spent a good deal of time looking down on the bay. A frown kept coming back to her face. She would smooth it away and smile briefly at Carl, but then the frown would come back.

"What's bothering you, Maida?" Carl asked finally.

"Just the usual things."

Carl shook his head. "It's something more than the usual things. I can read that in your face."

The girl reached for a cigarette and Carl held a match for her. He stared at her and tried to think of her standing across the desk from her husband with a gun in her hand, shooting him. He pictured her in Joseph Stoner's flat, stiff-lipped, tense, looking down at the second man she had shot.

He shook his head. It was hard to believe that Maida Ringling was the murderer. And yet a jury had convicted Ann Tobin whose eyes were even more warm and whose face was just as honest.

"I offered to help you the other day, Carl," Maida said suddenly. "And I meant to, but I'm the one that needs help. Will you help me? Will you tell me what to do?"

"If I can," Carl replied.

"It may even lead to what you want. I think it will."

"What is it?"

Maida touched her purse. "I went to the bank before I came here. I drew out ten thousand dollars. I have it here."

"Why?"

"To buy something. To buy something which will prove I killed my husband. Carl, I didn't kill him. I swear I didn't."

"Who wants the ten thousand?"

"Nick Van Hefflin."

"Van Hefflin!"

"But he's not the only one. That woman is in it with him. Sara Condit. And Fred Wallace planned it, planned it all, I know."

Carl lit a cigarette. "Let's get this straight and in order, Maida," he said slowly. "Who came to you first?"

"Nick Van Hefflin. He said he had the proof I killed my husband. He said he wanted ten thousand dollars or he would turn it over to the police."

"Turn what over to the police?"

"A statement signed by Joseph Stoner just before his death saying that his testimony at the trial had been a lie and that I had bought the gun used to kill my husband and registered it in Ann Tobin's name."

"A statement like that wouldn't stand up."

"He added more threats. He said he had a witness who would swear I had picked up Joseph Stoner the afternoon he was killed. He said he had the gun used to kill Stoner, that through the contacts he had it could easily be registered in my name. There was a letter, too, a letter I had written to Fred Wallace. It's a perfectly innocent letter but it could be made to sound terrible."

"What did you tell him?"

"I ordered him out of the house, then Fred came to see me. He's bitter. He hates me, Carl. I'm not afraid of what they have for I didn't kill my husband but I couldn't face the scandal, couldn't face going to jail. I don't have that kind of courage, Carl. I would rather pay them what they ask."

"So you are going to."

Maida bit her lips. "Doesn't this help prove what you wanted to prove? Doesn't it help prove that Ann was innocent?"

It didn't. It could all be a bluff. Encouraged by Wallace's bitter feeling toward Maida, Van Hefflin could have taken a long chance that Maida was guilty. Blackmail was his business. He and Sara Condit had worked on Ringling, but Ringling had died before they could collect and here was an opportunity to cash in on the investment already made.

"When do you pay them?" Carl asked.

"Tonight. Fred is going to call for me and we are going out. Somewhere we will meet Van Hefflin and I will pay him and get whatever he has."

"They're taking no chances on a trap, are they?"

Maida shook her head.

"What times does Fred call?"

"At nine."

"Suppose I go along with you?"

"He would never stand for it."

Carl stared thoughtfully through the window. "Yes he will. How can I get into your place by the back way?"

"You could come through the yard from the next street. We have a back hedge. There's a gate in it. I could have Antoine meet you."

"At eight-thirty."

Maida nodded. She said, "Carl, John and I weren't going to get a divorce. We talked about it. I even wanted one for a while but we had done nothing definite. I didn't love him but we got along."

Carl looked at his watch. He reached for the check and stood up. "Come on, Maida," he ordered. "It's getting late. I've got things to do."

The girl in McCaffery's office shook her head. "He won't like it, Mr. Lindholm," she said bluntly. "If you insist I'll tell him you're here, but he won't like it."

Carl grinned at her. "Then I insist."

The girl got up and went to see McCaffery. She was back almost at once. She was frowning. "You can go in," she said briefly.

Carl went in. He sat in the chair at McCaffery's desk and stared at the man and felt the bafflement he always felt when he came here and looked into McCaffery's blank, puffy face. If McCaffery was irritated at this visit he didn't show it. If he was interested he didn't show it.

"How do you like our jail?" McCaffery asked suddenly.

Carl shook his head. "I didn't like it. I didn't stay. I checked out."

"For how long?"

"For good, I hope."

"Not if you keep on bothering people."

"How would you like to help me?" Carl asked.

"I wouldn't."

"Maida Ringling is being blackmailed."

"Good."

"Tonight she is going to be sold some stuff for ten thousand dollars, stuff that will prove she killed her husband."

"Then collect it yourself and get your girl out of jail. Who's back of this?"

"Nick Van Hefflin, Sara Condit, and a man named Fred Wallace."

"What have they got on the Ringling woman?"

"I think they're bluffing."

"You don't pay ten thousand on a bluff."

"Maybe you do if you don't want your name in the papers, if you're afraid of a scandal, and if ten thousand doesn't mean much to you."

McCaffery lifted his hands and folded them over his stomach. "Why are you telling me about this? What do you want me to do?"

"Wallace is calling for Maida Ringling at nine. He is going to take her to meet Van Hefflin and the woman some place. I will be at the Ringling home and hold Wallace there. I want you to pick up Van Hefflin and Sara Condit and bring them to Ringlings. I want to see what they've got."

"Why not go to the police?"

"They might not play it my way, McCaffery. They would be interested in the blackmail angle. I'm interested in who killed Ringling. I don't want to sit on the sidelines. I want to be in the game."

"You're not asking me to do much, are you?"

"I'm asking you this. I'm asking you if you're going to let some small-time crooks from down south collect ten thousand dollars in your own town?"

McCaffery blinked. "Are you offering me the ten thousand?"

"I'm not interested in the ten thousand."

"What happens after we bring Van Hefflin and his woman to the Ringling home?"

"You've played poker, McCaffery. When you draw a hand you play it."

"This Ringling woman's got the money in cash?"

Carl nodded. "She's got it. In cash."

McCaffery drummed on the desk with his thick, pudgy fingers. The telephone rang. He answered it, listened for a moment, said, "Block him off," and then hung up.

"Well?" Carl asked.

"I'd like to see her squirm," McCaffery said slowly. "Yeah, I'd like to see her squirm. I'll draw some cards in your game, Lindholm, and I'll play 'em my way."

Carl stood up. "I get the stuff they're selling," he said bluntly."

"You said they were bluffing."

"Maybe they are, but I get the stuff they're selling. Don't make any mistake about that."

McCaffery shrugged his massive shoulders. "And don't you make any more mis-

takes. A man tailed you here. A copper. He's going to have a hard time following you when you leave. Until after this deal's over tonight, don't go to where you'll pick him up again."

CARL LINDHOLM sat in a cocktail bar on Pine Street and had a glass of beer. He was beginning to feel a stir of excitement. It had started when he had gone in to McCaffery and it was still there. It was starting to build up. He made moist circles with the bottom of his glass on the polished surface of the bar, then finished off his beer and ordered another.

He was sure he hadn't been followed here, but was he really sure. He hadn't thought he had been followed to McCaffery's. He hadn't noticed anyone following him since he had been released from jail.

A man came in and stood at the end of the bar and ordered a drink. He was a tall man with a thin, angular face, Carl looked at him and then looked away. He reminded himself that McCaffery had said they would make it a little difficult for the man who was following him to keep up. He wondered how McCaffery worked things like that. He wondered just how dangerous a man McCaffery was. He didn't actually know. He might know after tonight.

He was worried about tonight, worried about what he might have started, but the whole set-up fired his imagination. They would all be there tonight, all but Henry Price, all of those he had been working on. Maida, Fred Wallace, Nick Van Hefflin, Sara Condit and Sam McCaffery. They would be there under strange tensions but they would be there. Someone might crack or there might even be something in the stuff Maida was ready to buy for ten thousand dollars. McCaffery had said something it was hard to forget. McCaffery had said, *"You don't pay ten thousand on a bluff."* Maybe it was worth ten thousand to a woman like Maida Ringling to avoid a scandal. But maybe it wasn't. Maybe there was something she had to buy.

Carl walked back to a telephone booth and telephoned Gary Ingerman.

"Can I talk, Gary?" he asked when he heard her voice on the other end of the wire. "Is it safe to say anything."

"It should be," Gary answered, "but don't go too far. What is it?"

"I've got to see you."

"That's safe enough. I'll meet you at my apartment at five-thirty."

"But I can't come there. I just ducked a man who was following me. Your apartment might be covered."

"Then I'll meet you," Gary said promptly. "Where?"

"How about Stover's Grill on Van Ness?"

"Good, but I'll have to go home first. Make it six-thirty."

"Be sure someone doesn't follow you, Gary, in the hope of locating me. This is important."

"I can go out through the basement garage."

Carl frowned at the telephone. He said, "Gary, do you have a gun."

"No. Carl, is it that bad?"

"Could you borrow one?"

"I don't know. I don't know whom I would ask."

"Then forget it. See you at six-thirty at Stover's."

Carl hung up. He went back to the bar. The man with the thin, angular face was gone but he might be outside or someone else might be outside. Carl had another beer. He drank it slowly, fighting the mounting excitement in his body. "Maybe tonight, Ann," he said under his breath. "Maybe tonight."

GARY met him promptly at six-thirty and they had dinner at Stover's Grill. Gary was sure she hadn't been followed. She had left through the basement garage and the alley, had walked several blocks, then taken a taxi, then changed to a street car. She was tense, excited. She listened intently while Carl told her of his talk with Maida Ringling and with McCaffery.

"Carl," she asked, "Carl, why did you do it? Why did you bring McCaffery in?"

"I had to. McCaffery can pick up Sara Condit and Van Hefflin and bring them to Maida's. It gets me in on the deal for whatever it is they have to sell."

"It gets McCaffery in, too."

"I want him there. I'll have them all there, all but Price. All the people who had an interest in Ringling's death."

"What will happen, Carl?"

"I don't know."

"This is why you wanted a gun."

"One might come in handy."

Gary shook her head. "I couldn't get one. Carl, I'm going with you tonight."

"Oh, no."

"Yes, I am. You promised me a story. This might be it. I'm going to be there whether you like it or not. I'll keep out of sight. There's a pantry off of the parlor where I can stay. Or I could stay back in the hallway if you are in the library. I'm going, Carl."

"You'll keep out of sight?"

"I promise."

Carl nodded his head. "It might not be bad to have an impartial witness hear what happens," he said slowly. "All right, Gary. You're in. I've a strange notion we'll wind this up tonight. I can't get it out of my head."

"If we don't?"

Carl shrugged his shoulders. "If we don't, I start all over."

Gary's hand touched his arm and Carl could feel the pressure of her fingers through his coat. She said, "No, we start all over. Both of us. Don't ever leave me out."

VII

THEY turned down the street a block away from Ringling's and Carl checked the time on his watch. It was eight-twenty-five. Gary looked over her shoulder. "No one following us," she whispered. "The man we thought was following us went in that big apartment house."

Gary was holding his arm, holding it tight. "Carl, don't take any chances," she said under her breath. "It would take just one bullet to stop everything."

Carl grinned. He said, "Cut it out or you'll have me jittery. I think this is the house. We walk around it and to the hedge in back."

The house was dark. There was no one else on this street. They turned in toward the house, circled it and moved across a wide lawn to the hedge at the rear. Carl found a narrow gate and opened it. He stared across another wide lawn toward the Ringling home. A man's figure was moving toward the gate. This would be Antoine.

"She might not like it that I've come," Gary whispered.

"No, she'll understand," Carl answered. "You leave that to me."

Antoine came up to them. "Madame is expecting you, Mr. Lindholm," he said formally, and from his voice this might have been the front door and a very usual visit.

"Miss Ingerman is with me, Antoine," Carl answered. "Are we meeting in the library?"

"I believe so."

"Then you will find a place where she can wait in an adjoining room."

Antoine nodded as though this were the most normal request in the world. "You will come this way," he suggested.

They followed him across the lawn and toward a side door. "He's priceless," Gary whispered, "but maybe it's the usual thing for men to come in by this gate."

Carl chuckled. There wasn't much question what Gary thought about Maida Ringling. There never had been.

No one met them at the door. They passed down a wide hall, turned up another and at a door to the left, Antoine stopped. "The lady can wait in here," he said to Carl. "Straight ahead is the door to the library."

Gary squeezed Carl's hand. She said, "Luck, Carl. Keep your head and play things steady."

Carl grinned at her. "I will. You keep out of it."

He waited until Antoine and Gary had gone into this adjoining room, then walked ahead to the library door and opened it and stepped inside.

There was a fire in the fireplace and Maida was standing near it. She was wearing a black, formal gown, tight-fitting and cut very low. She had a cigarette in her hand. She looked up as Carl came in and a smile came quickly to her lips.

"I wish it was just you who was calling," she said as he crossed the room. "Carl, I can't go through with it."

"Go through with what?"

"I can't go out with Fred tonight and meet those people, I'm afraid to."

"You're not going to," Carl answered. "Where is the money?"

"In my bag on the chair."

Carl picked up the bag and opened it. He saw a package of currency, a cigarette case,

a handkerchief and the flat barrel of a gun. He took the gun from the bag. It was a small .32, fully loaded. He glanced at Maida and shook his head. "I'll take care of this," he said quietly.

Maida bit her lips. "I would have been afraid to use it, anyhow."

Carl dropped the gun into his pocket. He lit a cigarette, fixed himself a drink and another for Maida.

"What are you going to do when Fred gets here?" Maida asked.

"Talk to him."

"He won't have anything with him. The other two will have it."

"Maybe they'll show up here."

"You haven't gone to the police, Carl?"

Carl shook his head. He sampled his drink and stared at Maida Ringling. There was an undeniable tension in the girl's body, a tension which showed in the nervous movement of her eyes and lips. She had thrown her cigarette into the fire and now she lit another. Her hands weren't very steady. Carl had a feeling she was listening for the door chimes, that every thought she had was tied in with her fears about what might happen tonight. He glanced at his watch. It was getting close to nine.

"He'll be on time," Maida said suddenly. "He's always on time. Carl, he killed a man once. He told me so. He's dangerous."

Carl's eyes narrowed. "Maida," he asked, "how much of what you tell me is the truth? How much is just made up on the spur of the moment? How much is deliberately false? Who did Fred Wallace ever kill?"

A flush of color showed in Maida's face. She started to speak, then caught her breath. Clear and distinct came the sound of the door chimes. Maida's body stiffened. "He's here, Carl," she whispered. "That'll be him."

Carl nodded. He was standing across the fireplace from Maida where he could watch the door. He saw Antoine move down the hall, heard the door open, heard the sound of voices. In spite of the rigid self control he was trying to maintain his own breath was coming a little faster. He glanced at Maida and said, "Steady, Maida. Let me handle him. Just play along."

Maida Ringling didn't answer, she didn't even act as though she had heard. Her eyes were fastened on the doorway and suddenly Fred Wallace was standing there.

He came slowly into the room, a fixed smile on his handsome face, his eyes a little puzzled. He nodded to Carl and turned toward Maida. "Ready, darling."

"You've time for a drink first," Carl suggested.

"We haven't much time."

Carl fixed a drink and carried it to Wallace. "Sorry I haven't been able to see you," he said slowly. "The police interfered with my freedom for a while. What were you going to tell me?"

"I'm afraid I have nothing to tell you now, Lindholm," Wallace replied. "Or on the other hand, tonight may change everything. Give me a ring tomorrow."

The smile was still on his lips but he wasn't quite sure of himself and his eyes showed it. He tasted the drink Carl had handed him, looked at his watch and looked significantly at Maida. "They'll not like to be kept waiting, darling. We will not be long. Perhaps Mr. Lindholm can wait here."

"Or I could go along," Carl suggested.

Wallace shook his head. "I'm afraid not. This is a rather private matter."

Carl moved back to the mantel and leaned against it. "They might even join us here," he mentioned. "In fact, I think they will."

Wallace set his drink down. He looked from Carl to Maida. His eyes had narrowed and the smile was finally gone from his face. "Have you made a mistake, darling? Did you think the police could help you?"

Maida shook her head. "No, I didn't call the police."

"Then I don't understand what Lindholm's talking about. Are you going with me?"

Maida looked at Carl and Carl shook his head.

"Are you?" Wallace insisted.

"No, I think not. Have you a cigarette, Fred?"

Fred Wallace reached automatically into his pocket and drew out a cigarette case. He snapped it open and held it toward Maida. His eyes were fastened on her face. "You realize what this means?"

"No, I don't think I do."

"Perhaps I should take Carl with me."

Carl chuckled. "Surely, but I don't have any ten thousand dollars, Wallace."

Fred Wallace closed his cigarette-case. He put it back in his pocket. He stared from Carl to Maida, confused, baffled, angry, and showing all of this in his face.

Maida turned away and lit her cigarette. Her hands were more steady, now. Carl nodded his head. Maida was handling her end pretty well.

The sound of the door chimes reached into the room and Wallace stiffened and jerked around.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

Carl shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps your friends. They were invited."

WALLACE reached into his coat pocket, then took his hand out, empty. The pocket sagged a little. Carl hadn't noticed this before but he guessed, now, that Wallace had a gun in that pocket. Antoine's voice could be heard from the hallway and other voices and suddenly Nick Van Hefflin and Sara Condit were coming into the room flanked by two men Carl had never seen before and followed by Sam McCaffery. Van Hefflin was tall, thin, and pale, Sara Condit looked frightened.

"Just watch 'em for a while, boys," McCaffery ordered. "They can even sit down if they want to."

No one else in the room had anything to say.

Van Hefflin and the girl had stopped about halfway across it and the two men Carl didn't know stood a little behind them. McCaffery came on forward. He nodded to Carl, looked sharply at Wallace and then looked at Maida Ringling and the ghost of a smile showed on his thick lips. "Good evening, Mrs. Ringling," he nodded. "I'm McCaffery. That meant something to your husband. Tonight it may mean something to you."

Maida moistened her lips. She said, "How do you do, Mr. McCaffery. I didn't know all my husband's friends."

McCaffery grunted. "I didn't say I was his friend. Lindholm, here, even has a notion I might have killed him. Well, I might have, at that. Where's the money?"

Carl moved forward. "Just a minute, McCaffery. Where are the papers Mrs. Ringling was going to buy?"

McCaffery reached into his pocket and drew out an envelope. He laid it on the table. From another pocket he drew a gun. He placed the gun on the envelope.

"There you are, Lindholm," he said bluntly. "Now, where is the money?"

"In the purse."

McCaffery moved to where Maida Ringling's purse was lying. He picked it up, opened it, took out the package of currency, thumbed through it and then put it in his pocket.

Maida drew in a sudden sharp breath. She stepped forward and held out her hand. "That's my money," she said sharply. "Give it back."

McCaffery shook his head. "You're buying something for it, Mrs. Ringling. You're buying what's on the table over there and a good deal more. You're buying your freedom from some people who wouldn't have stopped at ten thousand. Blackmailers never stop. They would have gone on and on bleeding you until you didn't have any money left. They won't do that now. They're finished. They're leaving town tonight."

Fred Wallace backed away, his hand in his pocket, a tight, strained look on his face.

"Watch him, boys," McCaffery said bluntly. "He goes along with the others."

"What are you going to do with them?" Maida demanded.

"Start them out of town, Mrs. Ringling, and make pretty sure they know what'll happen to them if they ever come back. And don't worry, Lindholm. You don't want them. You've got your murderer right here."

McCaffery was looking at Maida Ringling, looking at her with those cold expressionless eyes of his. Maida backed away from him. She lifted a hand to her throat. She shook her head. "No, I didn't kill him. I swear I didn't."

"Take them away, boys," McCaffery ordered. "You know what to do."

There was no argument from Van Hefflin, Sara Condit or Fred Wallace. The men who had come with McCaffery marched them from the library. Carl heard the front door open and close. But he was only vaguely aware of this. He was watching Maida, watching her as she moved back to the wall near the fireplace and stood there, tense, rigid, and with almost a look of panic in her eyes. She shook her head again. "I

didn't kill him. I couldn't have killed him. I—I never fired a gun in my life."

McCaffery watched her and suddenly he laughed and turned to face Carl. "I think she's right, Lindholm. I think she's telling the truth. She's the only one besides Ann Tobin who could have killed Ringling, but she probably didn't do it."

Carl caught his breath. "But you said—"

"I wanted to see her squirm. That's all."

"That stuff on the table—"

"The gun is a thirty-two. Stoner was killed with a thirty-eight. The statement signed with Stoner's name is a forgery. Van Hefflin admitted it. There's a letter from Mrs. Ringling to Fred Wallace all about going away some day but you can't hang a woman with a letter like that. You had it figured right. It was all a bluff but it could have been built up to a nice scandal and the ten thousand dollars wasn't as important to Maida Ringling as a clean name."

Carl Lindholm sucked in a long, slow breath. He mopped a hand over his face. "It might have been any of them," he said slowly. "Wallace, Van Hefflin, Sara Condit. Where are they, McCaffery?"

"It couldn't have been any of those three. Meyers checked their alibis and Meyers is thorough. I had no part in it at all. You have only Maida Ringling left and I don't think she is the one you're after. Figure it out for yourself, Lindholm. Would a woman who would pay blackmail to duck a scandal be crazy enough to create one by planning a murder?"

Maida was still leaning against the wall. She was still shaking her head. McCaffery stared at her again then turned toward the door. He looked back and said, "It wasn't as much fun as I thought it would be," and then he was gone.

Carl Lindholm reached for a cigarette. He tried to analyze what had happened, tried to see in it something with some kind of meaning, but he could find no meaning at all. Wallace, Van Hefflin and Sara Condit had taken advantage of the doubts he had raised in their minds with regard to Ann Tobin's guilt. They had played on Maida's fear of a scandal. McCaffery had stepped in and taken the money Maida was willing to pay and had moved them out of the picture. Maida was left, and McCaffery, and Price, and he had boasted once that his list would always be open. He turned abruptly toward the side door.

"Carl," Maida called. "Carl, where are you going?"

He looked around. "Some place where I can think. Some place where I can plan what to do next."

"You—still think I killed him."

Carl shook his head. He moved into the adjoining room where Gary was waiting and Antoine, his expression as calm as ever, was standing at the hall door.

VIII

THEY were in Gary's apartment again. Gary had made coffee and had laced it with brandy and the warm glow that it brought helped Carl relax. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes and tried to think about tomorrow, tried to think about where he should turn now.

"Carl, you've done everything you could," Gary said slowly, "everything humanly possible. I don't know where you can turn next."

Carl shook his head. "I haven't even started. There's still Henry Price, Maida, McCaffery. There's Antoine whom I almost overlooked."

"But you don't think Maida did it."

"I don't think so, but I don't know."

"Why did McCaffery help you tonight."

"Partly for the ten thousand, partly because he considered Van Hefflin and company as outside competition. And partly, I think, to see Maida squirm. That's what he called it, though she didn't exactly squirm."

Gary sighed. She said, "I'll get more coffee," and went out to the kitchen.

Carl noticed her handbag on the floor. He got to his feet, picked it up, held it in his hands for a moment and then laid it on the davenport. An almost startled expression had come into his eyes. He had found it, the thing he had been overlooking the weak point in the case against Ann Tobin, the hole in the wall of evidence that had been used against her. It was something which had been there all the time, something so apparent he didn't understand why he hadn't seen it before.

He moved back to his chair and sat down, his mind keenly active. It wasn't all clear yet but pieces of the puzzle were falling into

In the next SHORT STORIES

— — April 10th

WHEN Oscar Johnson, Slim Pickens and Frijole were driving home after a heavy night in Scorpion Bend, Frijole fell out of the buckboard. His two thoughtful friends picked him up, but when they got home they found that what they had rescued was the body of a dead stranger . . . take the story on from there.

"Forty-Eight Hours for Henry"

W. C. TUTTLE

"What's the use of talkin' Railroads, Dams, Highways? This is a shipyard and they want delivery ahead of time!"

"Deadline Advanced"

STEVE HAIL

H. S. M. KEMP

PETER DAWSON

SHOOTER'S CORNER

. . . all the way from Camp Shanks to the Elbe without a scratch, only to get a load of scrap iron in Brooklyn!

ARMORED PAY CAR

A novelette

Steuart M. Emery

place. He had the answer, now. He knew who had planned this, who had bought the gun, who had killed John Ringling. He drew in a slow, haggard breath and mopped a hand over his face. He was perspiring. It seemed suddenly very warm in here.

Gary came back from the kitchen. "More coffee, Carl?"

Carl Lindholm shook his head. He looked up at Gary. "I've figured it out, Gary," he said slowly. "I know who it was. I know the murderer."

Gary set the coffee pot down. "Maida Ringling again?"

"No. Not Maida Ringling, nor Antoine, Price or McCaffery. No one we've talked about as the murderer. And I don't have any proof at all but the proof will be easy."

"Who was it, Carl?"

Carl stared at the floor. "I know who it was, but I almost wish I didn't."

"You're sure, Carl?"

"I'm sure."

Gary reached for her handbag. She opened it, took out some cigarettes. She lit one, sat down on the davenport and leaned back. She looked soberly at Carl.

"I picked up your handbag a minute ago," Carl went on. "I could feel a gun in it. I asked you to get me a gun. You said you couldn't. It was a little thing, a lie like that, but it pointed to a great deal more."

Gary bit her lips. "What did it point to?"

"Not to other lies but to things which fitted in. You met Ann when you went out to the plant on a story. You interviewed Ringling shortly before his death. You knew them both. None of the others did. Someone told Ringling that Ann was in San Francisco, must have told him, for he hadn't known it and Ann hadn't known he was here."

"Is that all, Carl?"

"No. There was the car which almost ran me down when I left here one night and the convenient basement garage in this apartment through which you can go."

"The car didn't hit you. It could have."

"It almost hit me."

Gary reached into her handbag and drew out a gun. She held it in her lap.

"Yours?" Carl asked.

"Yes, and the gun which killed Joseph Stoner, the one you thought you were buying tonight with Maida's money."

"He recognized you."

"During the trial. He wrote me a letter. He was a close-fisted, mean little man. The world is better off with him dead. But I don't want to kill you, Carl. I don't want to kill you."

There was nothing dramatic about this at all. There was no tension. Gary's voice was low, controled. She sat in a corner of the davenport, holding the gun, frowning at it. She might have sat just this way in Stoner's flat, Carl realized, a hand on the gun in her purse, talking to Joseph Stoner.

"You had no proof, of course," Gary went on, "but you would have dug things up once you were on the right trail. I knew that from the first. I knew you would keep at it for a long time. I was glad when you came to me for help because that meant I could watch you, know what you were doing. It was much more satisfactory than a report from a private detective agency."

"Then you are the one who hired the men who followed me."

Gary nodded her head.

"You shot Ringling just before Ann got there, knowing she would be blamed for the crime."

"Of course."

"How did you get away?"

"Through the bathroom window, just as you figured. It was awfully simple. Murder is awfully simple, Carl. I've had this gun for years. It can never be traced. Ballistics will prove it is the gun which killed Joseph Stoner. The police already suspect you of that murder. If the gun is found here in your hand the explanation I give will be very obvious. You killed Stoner in a fit of anger when you couldn't break down his identification of Ann Tobin. Tonight, in a fit of despondency over your failure to help Ann, you killed yourself. I had no chance to stop you. It's an easy way out for the police. They will take it."

"They might not."

"They convicted Ann Tobin."

"Gary," Carl said slowly, "why did you pick her? Why did you kill Ringling?"

"It's a long story."

"We have plenty of time."

"Not much time, Carl. I can't stand this much longer. Do you know, once I thought you might get tired of fighting against something you couldn't break and that I might

take Ann's place. I was dreaming, I guess. You would never have stopped, would you?"

"Never."

"I realized that tonight. I knew that some time you would learn I had come from Colorado. While I was fixing the coffee I knew what I had to do."

"What happened back in Colorado?"

"John Ringling was an assistant district attorney. He sent my husband to the penitentiary for life. And the chief witness against him was little Ann Tobin. She almost mentioned it during the trial. Don't you remember, she said, *'I admired Ringling from the time I met him when I was a witness in a trial.'* I almost had heart failure when she made that statement."

Gary was holding the gun in her hand, turning it from side to side. She wasn't looking at Carl. There was a slight frown on her face and her lips were tight.

"I don't want to, Carl," she said slowly. "I don't want to but there's no other way."

She lifted the gun a little and looked over at him. Her eyes were hard, sharp, and there were tight wrinkles around her mouth. Carl reached in his pocket. The gun he had taken from Maida was there. His hand closed around it, aimed it through his pocket at Gary. But he couldn't pull the trigger. Even after all that had been said he couldn't pull the trigger.

He got to his feet and Gary's gun tilted suddenly toward him. "Wait, Gary," he said hoarsely. "Wait, I—"

SHE was going to fire the gun she was holding. He could read the determination in her eyes, in the abrupt tension which had come over her body. He lunged toward her, shouting her name and his hand tightened convulsively on the gun he was holding. It wasn't aimed at her now but Carl heard the sharp crack of the gun and saw Gary jerk a little. Then he heard another explosion and felt the numbing shock of a blow on his head.

He fell to the floor almost at Gary's feet, but he didn't know it. Gary dropped to his side and whispered his name. She cried, "Carl, Carl, I didn't mean to." But he didn't know that, either. A man who had been standing in the shadows across the street was now running toward the apartment house, clawing out a police gun.

It was quiet in the hospital. The nurses moved in and out of Carl's room on shoes that made no noise. They wouldn't answer any questions. They kept telling him he shouldn't talk, that he should conserve his strength and that everything was all right. There was a vase of flowers in the room. A card had come with them, a card which read: "Congratulations, Maida." There was another vase of flowers and a card saying: "Now I only have $9990.00 left."

He opened his eyes once and Detective Meyers was in the room. Meyers wasn't wearing his hat. He didn't look at all natural without it. But his scowl was natural.

"We had a fellow across the street, waiting to pick you up when you left," Meyers said. "If he hadn't been there an' got right into that girl's apartment, you would have bled to death sure. Or maybe she would have finished you off with another bullet, the one she used on herself when she saw she was cornered. You're no good with a gun, are you, Lindholm? The one you fired through your pocket missed by a foot. At that, it may have startled her enough so she didn't get you square in the head."

"She's dead?" Carl asked. "She didn't get to tell you—"

"She's dead but it took a little while. She talked quite a bit before the end. She sent you a message. She said to tell you she was sorry. Hell, ain't that just like a woman."

"And Ann Tobin?"

"Things like that," Meyers answered, "take time."

You didn't mark time by days in the hospital. You marked time by when you woke. It was dark or it was light. You opened your eyes and the room was empty or a nurse was there or the doctor but you weren't interested in them.

Carl dozed fitfully. He heard someone come into the room but he didn't open his eyes. It would just be the nurse for a temperature reading or a sponge or with another pill. Footsteps crossed to his bed but he still kept his eyes shut. He felt a hand on his cheek, heard the sound of his name and his eyes were suddenly open and he was looking up at Ann Tobin.

This was what he had been waiting for.

. . . So Beat Out by the Desert, He Was Talkin' Away to a Horned Toad

THE KILLER WAS LEFT HANDED

By HAPSBURG LIEBE

HE KEPT trying for an eastward direction. Always when he was set on a true course, a sea of pear, or a line of cliffs, or a god's garden of pinnacles and boulders threw him off. More and more time passed. Lack of water and food had worn his strength thin. But the will to survive, not perish, drove him on.

Delirium began brooding in his heat-inflamed gray eyes, and delirium does queer things. He spoke to a horned toad.

"Look for green cottonwood trees, Stant," the toad said, "they will be on a creek, which means the end of the desert."

"What the hell," said Stant, "you think I *am* looking for?"

The day grew old. He was staggering when he saw the green trees ahead. Thoughts of water stiffened him, and he lurched into a weaving run—

Riding a trail that followed the creek were two men. One of them was young, slim, dressed expensively but in poor taste. The other was well past thirty, tall and lean and dried-out, in nondescript clothing ex-

cept for a fine, pearl-gray Stetson hat, and a law star gleamed dully on his unbuttoned vest.

"Hombre in bad shape over there in the desert, Pasco!" suddenly exclaimed the officer, pointing with a thumb. "Fallin' down—gettin' up—fallin' again—and this time looks like he'll stay down. Come on, Pasco!"

They rode fast to the now unconscious victim of the dry wasteland, reined in, stepped from their saddles. Pasco burst out, "Why, it's that stranger, Abel. It's that same killer, sure. Told you he'd hit into the desert, didn't I?"

THE sun of another day was high when the stranger woke to find himself in possession of his faculties again.

He was in fresh underwear, in a wooden bed in a small back room. No thirst tormented him now, no hunger gnawed like a rat at his vitals. His attention went to the tall man behind the law star, who sat in a straight-backed chair propped against an inner wall.

"I owe a good deal to somebody," he said, "for bringing me in and looking after me. Was it you?"

The tall man nodded. "Pasco Blum and my Cousin Serena helped. Reckon you'd like to know a few things. I'm Deputy Sheriff Abel Corrington. This is my back-room livin'-quarters, me bein' a bachelor; front room is my office on the main street of Cottonwood City—just in case you don't know the name o' the town. Reckon you had a tough time in the desert, Mr. Bell."

"Sure did," Stant Bell said. "Would have made it all right if my horse hadn't busted a leg so that I had to shoot it. On foot, my grub and water didn't last near halfway. Look, Deputy. I've got to send a wire. Telegraph office here?"

"No," the lawman said, "but there's a phone in the big store, and you can phone your message to the telegraph office in Oaksville, the county seat. Want me to do it for you, Bell?"

He had an eye that had grown hard and narrow. The man abed also narrowed an eye.

"Don't believe I was carrying anything with my name on it, Deputy. How'd you know my name is Bell?"

"Told us while you was outa your head, and that's about all you did tell us," said Abel Corrington. "What'd you do with your rifle?"

"I had no rifle," Stant Bell said. "Lost my six-shooter falling into a hole in the dark, and didn't miss it until later. The belt of cartridges got heavy, and I threw it away; was in a bad fix then. You're suspicious of me, I see. What's up?"

"You're accused," answered Deputy Corrington, "of waylayin' and killin' a man named Simpson George. Reckon you cain't make alibi for three nights ago."

Bell now sat up in bed. "And me in that desert?" He laughed a little, sobered instantly. "I never heard the name of Simpson George before. It sounds faked. Mind tellin' me about him?"

"I don't mind. Big man, close to forty, wore gambler black all the time but wasn't altogether a gambler; the truth is, George was the brains of a rustler outfit—but nobody had any right to kill him."

There were quick footsteps in the front room. Stant lay back and drew the coverlet almost to his chin. A young woman drew up at the bedside, a slender, blue-eyed young woman with ash-blond hair. Her countenance was drawn and heavy with grief, but for all of that she was handsome.

She stood there and looked at the stranger, looked hard at him, for a long minute. His mild gaze held upon her evenly. Then she spoke.

"Abel, as I told you last night, you needn't be surprised if you find that Pasco Blum was mistaken," and she turned and left the room.

THE deputy seemed a good deal bothered. He took off his fine, pearl-gray Stetson hat—his secret joy and pride—and eyed it as though he'd never seen it before.

"Who was that, and what's eating her?" asked Bell.

The lawman said, "She's Serena Corrington, my cousin." He kept going: "Her and her daddy owns a ranch, the buildin's of which sets at the edge of town. But no cows much now. Old Dan, my uncle, took on in a cattle syndicate and it broke him up. A few days ago he got on a blues bender, first time he ever was any ways spifflicated, and that was when the—er, the trouble—"

There he broke off, to say, low-voiced,

"Here comes Uncle Dan now, and Pasco Blum."

The colorfully attired young Blum walked in first. Daniel Corrington wasn't far past fifty, but his worried, stubbly-bearded face gave him the appearance of a much older man. Pasco lighted a cigarette with his left hand and flicked the burned match through the open back doorway.

"What did the killer have to say for himself, Abel?"

Stant Bell sat up swinging his bare feet to the floor. Ignoring Blum, he said to the officer, "I didn't see my clothes anywhere. If you'll find them for me, I'll hustle to the phone you mentioned."

"Your clothes was in such bad shape I decided to have 'em fixed up for you," the officer said. He hurried on, "Might help matters, Bell, if you'd tell me all about yourself."

"Sorry, but I can't, just now. How did it happen that I'm accused of this killing?"

"I'll tell him, Abel," Pasco Blum said, and faced Bell. "You're slick, ain't you? Drop from nowhere into Oaksville, and get into a stud game with Simpson George, my best friend. He wins your money, which is mostly in fifty-dollar bills. Then you trail him here to Cottonwood City, ambush him and get the money back. You hit the desert for a getaway, lose your hoss, lose yourself, and come out right where you went in, as a lost man is likely to do. We found the six fifties in your pocket. Didn't we, Abel?"

Stant Bell looked toward Deputy Corrington, who said, "Yes, pardner, that money was in your pocket, like Pasco told you. I've not notified the Oaksville sheriff yet. Sort of thought I ought to wait and see if you could clear yourself."

"Thanks," a little angrily replied Bell. "The six fifties was for my expenses. I crossed the desert, to save time; that is, I meant to save time. No telegraph office over there, and I had to send a message—important as the devil—please, Abel, will you hustle my clothes up?"

Old Dan Corrington, much shaken, broke into speech now.

"Abel, that man is not guilty, and you're stark crazy if you think—"

"Uncle Dan," the deputy cut in sharply, "I want you to get out of here right now!"

His relative, a perfect picture of gloom, stumbled through the alley doorway and vanished. All at once Stant Bell thought he saw light. He rose in Abel Corrington's underwear and barked at Pasco Blum. "You go too, skin out!"

Blum dropped his left hand to the butt of his holstered six-shooter, had one good look into the stranger's fiery gray eyes, and tarried no longer. When he was gone, Bell sat down on the bed again. He said:

"That young jigger is a bad egg, Abel, or I never saw a bad egg; sticks out all over him. I ran him off because I wanted to talk with just you. Let's figure a little.

"Cattleman who's had a heap of tough luck gets on what you call a 'blues bender.' Big cow-thief is killed. The cattleman, so worried that he looks like a ghost, tells you that accused stranger is *not* guilty. The daughter is grieving as much as her dad. Anybody could see through this, Deputy—your uncle has had the killing put at his door, and you, hoping against hope that it was somebody else, took a long chance on me!"

Abel Corrington nodded. "Yes. But it was Pasco's idea, that you done it. Serena is a fool about her daddy; for him to be convicted would near kill her. I sure don't know what to do, Bell. Cain't keep the Oaksville sheriff away much longer. Here's your big bills, and the few dollars in change you had. Now I'll hustle out and see if your clothes are ready."

He hadn't been gone ten minutes when an old woman came with Bell's clothing, all neatly cleaned and mended. Bell paid her double. In the time of ten more minutes, Stant was in Cottonwood City's biggest store and phoning his message into the Oaksville telegraph office.

Deputy Corrington was at his scarred old desk, frowning down at nothing, when Bell walked in and sat down nearby and said:

"How about giving me particulars of that killing, Abel?"

The lawman looked up, sat back in his chair, took off his fine, wide-brimmed pearl-gray hat and put it on the desk. After a moment he started talking.

"Already told you that Simpson George was a big man, close to forty, always wearin' black, and a kingpin cattle rustler. I'd got some real goods on him at last. Around this time, it was, that George spruced him-

self up and went to my Cousin Serena Corrington with an offer to restock her dad's ranch if she'd be his wife.

"Rightly, it made the girl mad and they had a hot argument. This was during the middle of old Dan's spree. He got the idea that George had struck the girl, though he hadn't, and Uncle Dan then swore he'd get Simpson George and lit out to hunt him. I didn't know of it till later.

"Well, next morning Pasco Blum comes runnin' in here, whinin' like a puppy, and says he's just found Simpson layin' dead on the creek trail, which leads up to a ranch Simpson owned; and Pasco then tells about the stranger gamblin' with George over in Oaksville. I'd meant to ride up and arrest the big cow-thief, but this put an end to it."

Stant Bell asked, "What did old Dan Corrington have to say about the shooting?"

"Honest about it, Uncle Dan is. Says he don't remember shootin' the jigger. Spifflicated, y'understand. Part o' what he drank was Mexican *sotol,* and you know how tricky that is."

Bell grinned faintly. "Yeah—the third glass, and you walk headon into a freight train. Who is Pasco Blum?"

"Nobody seems to know," Deputy Abel Corrington answered promptly. "Mexicans gave him his nickname, I've heard. Simpson George found him somewhere, dressed him up and fed him up and used him for sneak jobs. Pasco sure did like Simpson. If you suspicion Pasco, Bell, you're wrong."

A clerk from the big store appeared at the street doorway to announce, "Phone wants you, Abel."

The officer rose, reached for his pearl-gray Stetson and got it, and hurried out.

BELL, too, went to the street. He found a barber shop in a corner of the one hotel and got a working over. As he left the chair, he spied Pasco Blum standing in the doorway, lighting a cigarette with his left hand. Having paid the barber, Bell put on his hat and was in the act of passing Blum when the slender young man spoke.

"It was the Oaksville sheriff wanted Abel on the phone."

Stant paused, eyed Blum frostily. "So you called the sheriff up and blabbed."

"Sure. I wanted him to come out here and get you."

"Keen on it; I noticed that before," Bell said, "and it made something for me to think about."

Blum clouded fast. "Simpson George—"

"Was your best friend; yes, I know," said Bell, and he walked off.

He went to Abel Corrington's office. Abel was there at his desk again. He said:

"Bell, Pasco phoned the sheriff about you and your wire, and the sheriff made the operator show him a copy, and now he wants to know what it means. You sent only a few words—*Beat Montezuma to the trigger* —to Stant Bell in Texas, from Stant Bell here. Sounds loco. Mind explainin'?"

"Sorry, but I can't explain just yet," Bell said.

There were footsteps behind him, and he jerked around to see the girl, Serena Corrington.

"Anything new, Abel?" she inquired worriedly.

Her deputy cousin shook his head. Stant Bell spoke.

"Abel, in the back of my head I've been carrying the wish that I could be of some help to your folks in their trouble. You helped me, you know! I've been afraid of how you'd take it if I horned in. Don't you think that, working together, the two of us might uncover something that you, maybe, have missed?"

He feared he'd put it awkwardly. The deputy brightened, sat up, pushed his big pearl hat back off his perspiring forehead and said in a voice that held new friendliness, "So you don't believe Uncle Dan is guilty."

"Sort of feel it in my bones that he's not. We ought to work fast, Abel; you can see why."

"We're thankful to you, Mr. Bell," the girl said. "I think, Abel, I'd accept his offer."

Corrington nodded. "Well, Stant, it happened up at the creek a ways from where Pasco Blum and me found you. Simpson George had been ridin' to his ranch, at night, I gathered, when he was shot from ambush. Pasco and me had been over the ground for the third time, lookin' for sign, and hadn't found any. But if you want me to, Stant, I'll go over the spot again, with you."

As the two went toward the street, Serena Corrington gave Bell a pale smile that went deeper into him, a man's man if ever there was a man's man, than any smile ever had gone before.

The deputy had a horse at the liveryman's. Stant rented one. After having loped a mile across open range, they dismounted and dropped rein near the trail that ran along beside the creek cottonwoods.

"Right here," began Abel Corrington, "is where Pasco found Simpson layin' dead. The bullet went clean through him slick as a whistle, and by that I judged it was a rifle; they've got more force than a short gun, as you must know. He was shot from the front. Coulda been done from behind any o' them trees ahead there, by somebody on foot, or mounted. Like I told you, we uncovered no sign; no hoofprints, and no footprints except in the trail."

"Likely it was done on foot," Bell said. "A horse could have winded George's horse, nickered, and spoiled things. Let's look around the most likely cottonwoods and see what we see."

The trees stood close to the stream. The ground there was soft, and should have registered footprints. After some fifteen minutes, Stant Bell's searching eyes found dry grass that had a slight appearance of having been disturbed. It was just back of one of the biggest cottonwoods.

With a forked stick he investigated. The grass was loose. He swept is aside and uncovered footprints!

"A drinking man, mad, wouldn't bother to hide his tracks that way, Abel. I doubt that he'd even think about it."

Corrington admitted this. "But," he said, "it only indicates that George was shot by a man on foot, and by somebody wearin' boots of average size. We'll need a heap more than what's here to clear old Dan, Bell."

Stant knelt over the prints and studied them. Presently he came to his feet talking fast.

"Abel, your killer was left handed, and Pasco Blum is!"

At once Deputy Corrington wanted to know, "How can you tell if a man's left handed by his tracks?"

"You just happened to overlook one small thing, Abel," Bell said. "It's plain that the killer wasn't here long. He stepped up behind this tree, fired the shot, then stepped back. A right handed man when he shoots a rifle stands with his left foot in front, right foot bracing, and the other way around. You can see by the end track there that this man stood with his *right* foot in front!"

"I get it," Corrington said. "But we'll need more proof even than that, Stant. And we'll need a motive—and Pasco Blum didn't have one. Well, nothin' more we can do here, is there?"

They went to the horses, swung into saddles and rode back to town.

IN THE deputy's office again, the two sat down and tried to figure the thing. They got nowhere. If Blum had quarreled with his boss—but he hadn't, evidently. Abel had never been so blue. There weren't many of these Corringtons, and they stuck together; it was almost a religion. Abel sat back in his chair and closed his eyes wearily. Stant Bell's voice came again, yet again, but it had no meaning for the lawman. Poor old Dan, he was thinking. The court would call the killing premeditated murder. And poor Serena—

For minutes upon minutes the tall, sun-dried officer sat like one in a dark trance. Then Bell hurried in from the street. Corrington hadn't noticed that he'd gone out. Stant bent over the desk and spoke rapidly, half whispering:

"Don't know much about women, Abel, but always heard they were keen on details, and went to Serena to see if she knew any little thing that would help—and she sure did. She's smart, all right; why she hadn't connected it up herself, I'll never know; numb with grief, maybe. But let's don't

waste time. You run to the phone and call your boss law dog out here!"

This was as a spark of fire to gunpowder. Abel Corrington rose from his chair so fast that he dislodged his much prized, pearl-gray Stetson hat. He caught it on the drop, and ran.

LESS than an hour afterward, the Oaksville sheriff galloped into Cottonwood City. Pasco Blum had not missed the arrival of the sheriff. He ambled past Corrington's office on the other side of the street, peered through the open doorway and saw the three men grouped at the desk, and noted that Stant Bell was doing most of the talking. It was in tones so low that he caught no word.

Very curious, wholly confident, Pasco soon decided that he would go over.

He halted directly behind the senior officer. Abel Corrington said, "Why, here he is now," and the sheriff jerked around to say in a voice with an edge:

"Pasco, you're not half smart enough to be a crook. Dan Corrington had saddled himself with the guilt, yet you stuck to that fool tale about Simpson George gambling with a stranger simply because you'd told it before you found out about Dan—hell-bent on clearing yourself, when you hadn't been accused. Up with your hands!"

He reached for his weapon. The killer's left hand streaked for his six-shooter. He was faster than the sheriff, faster than the deputy, but not faster than Stant Bell. Stant made a swift grab; the hammer of the Blum gun fell on the thin muscle between his thumb and forefinger; with the other fist he literally knocked Blum loose from his six-shooter.

"If we need any more proof," Bell said, "this is it."

"Right!" the sheriff barked, and applied the iron bracelets.

Glaring down at them, Pasco cried, "You got nothin' on me!"

"No?" The senior officer's smile was granite. "Listen, you. When you picked on Bell here, you sure picked on the wrong hombre. He worked it all out plumb correct and with only a little help—which is not saying a thing against Abel. Just keep listening, Pasco.

"Abel had dug up big evidence against Simpson George, the ace cow-thief, and George wanted him silenced; had detailed you to the job, I don't doubt. You thought you was shootin' my deputy, on that creek trail, knowing that he meant to ride it up to George's ranch to arrest him. All that was plain to you in the dark was that *big pearl hat!*"

Pasco Blum looked sick. The officer pursued quickly:

"Of course, you destroyed the evidence. Too bad that neither you nor Abel knew that your boss, usually wearing all black clothes, had bought himself a fine gray hat like Abel's before going to call on Serena Corrington!"

"Musta bought it in Oaksville," the deputy said; then he threw at Pasco, "When Serena remembered that new Stetson and told Bell, why, Bell had it figured. But he already knew that the killer was left handed."

LATE in the afternoon Stant had a reply to his wire, went looking for Abel and found him at the Corrington ranch house in the edge of town. All three Corringtons sat on the front gallery. Old Dan, shaven clean, seemed altogether a different man. Serena's eyes were very bright. Bell addressed the deputy:

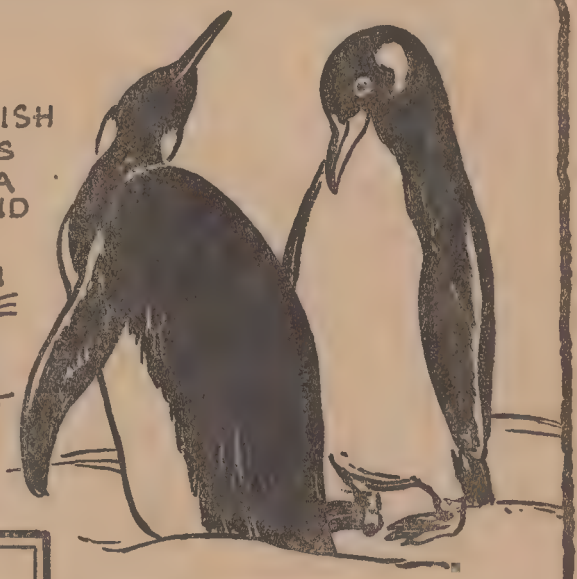
"I'm at liberty to explain that telegram now. The Stant Bell in Texas is my daddy, a cattleman. He'd sent me to size up a big herd that was for sale, over beyond the desert; owned by a man in Texas. The cows were worth the price, and I wired my dad—in a little code of our own, for some other folks wanted the cows—to close the deal quick, and he did. Just one hitch. Range over there is bad. Handling the big herd is my job, and I hardly know where to take it!"

Daniel Corrington said, "Plenty good range around here. Serena and I had decided to lease our ranch buildings, and if you want 'em it can be arranged."

"Nothing would suit me better," Stant Bell said, and he switched his attention to the Corrington girl. Her eyes were still bright upon him. Somehow he knew then that she and her father wouldn't be giving up their old home for very long.

Curioddities By Weill

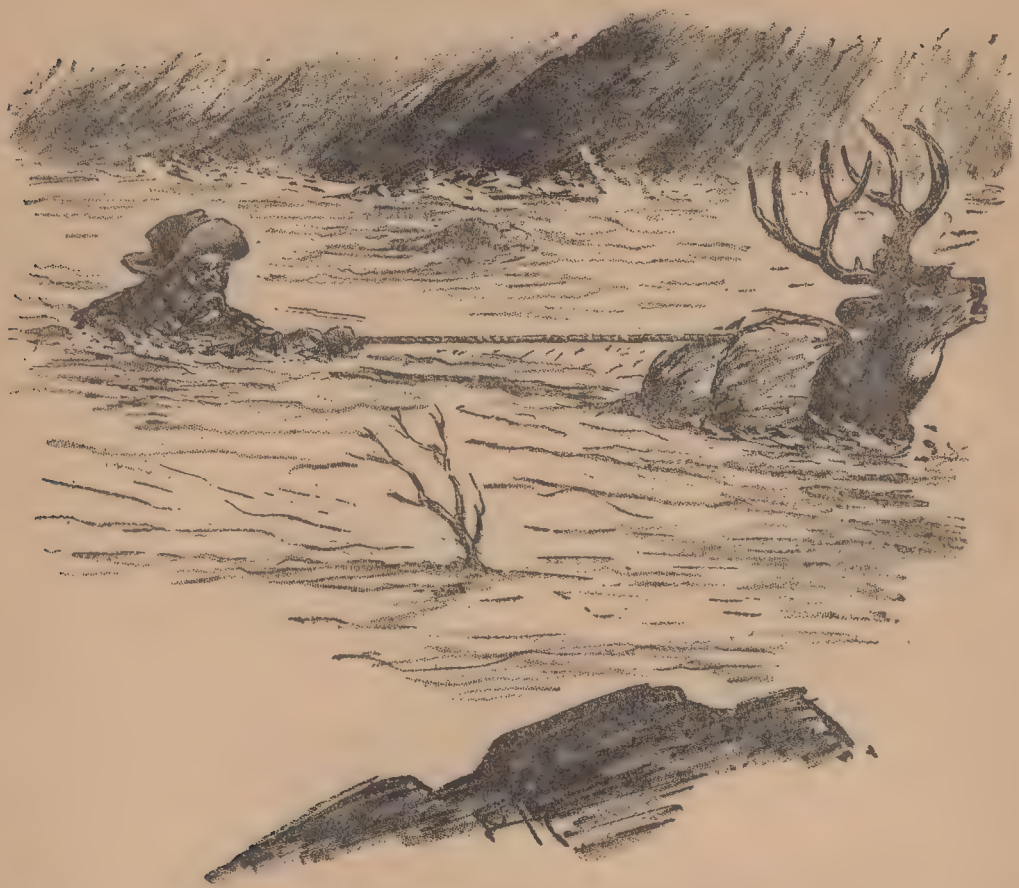
THE PENGUIN IS UNABLE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE SEXES AND MUST SELECT A MATE BY **TRIAL** AND **ERROR!** THE LARGEST SPECIES IN THE WORLD ARE THE KING PENGUIN AND EMPEROR PENGUIN, WHICH ARE AT LEAST ***THREE FEET HIGH!***



THE SPHENODON IN THE ISLANDS OF NEW ZEALAND IS THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF ONE OF THE MOST ANCIENT AND PRIMITIVE ORDERS OF REPTILES OF ***200,000,000 YEARS AGO!***

THE MUDSKIPPER OF BORNEO IS ABLE TO CLIMB THE ROOTS OF MANGROVE TREES BY MOVING ITS FORWARD FINS! IT BREATHES THROUGH ITS TAIL FIN AND IS EQUIPPED WITH MOVABLE BULBOUS EYES THAT CAN BE ADJUSTED FOR *EXCELLENT* ***VISION IN THE AIR!***

Tourist Attraction Was Pete's Best Act — So He Just Had to Get Back on the Job



WHERE IS PANHANDLE PETE?

By RICHARDSON PIERCE

THE *Times'* reporter, Danny Ralston, stopped at the rangers' office in Rainier National Park, and asked for Buck Seaton. "I'm Seaton," a park ranger said. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm working up a feature story," Ralston answered. "Something about animals. I like to get a picture of a bear hibernating, if that is practical. Are any of your animals, for example, named? Do they have personalities like human beings? I'm kind of vague about it all, I know, but it seems to me there must be a story kicking around somewhere. The nation did a lot of touring the first spring and summer after the war, and this year there should be even more. People can get parts to repair their cars; there'll be new tires; and even new cars. Tourists go to national parks and all of them are crazy about wild animals."

"I get what you mean," Buck Seaton said. "And your idea is to whet the public interest with a little wildlife stuff?"

"That's it, a sort of appetizer," Ralston said. "Months ahead of vacation time, people like to plan."

"Answering some of your questions,"

Buck Seaton said, "is a cinch. Have animals names? Yes. There's Old Lady Riley a black bear. Panhandle Pete, a buck deer that always begs for cigarettes; and his son, Chiseler, who chisels on his old man's game. Say! There's a big story in Panhandle Pete."

"Yeah?"

"Head the yarn, Where *Is* Panhandle Pete?" Buck Seaton said, "and go on from there. We'd like to know where he is, and if he hasn't been turned into camp meat for some miner or trapper, we'd like him back.

"Here's what happened. During the war, an outfit camped near here wanted a mascot. Pete, being tame, got within reach of some of the boys and was captured, loaded into a truck, and smuggled aboard an Alaska-bound transport. He ended up on an Alaskan island, and No-Shirt McGee, an Alaskan sourdough, and Jack Jefford, chief pilot of the Civil Aeronautics Administration, flew him to the mainland at no little cost to themselves in bruises and money."

"The buck has a will of his own?"

"Definitely," Buck Seaton continued. "Later, they tried to team him up with caribou for a Christmas celebration. Pete didn't like being a Santa Claus reindeer under such conditions, but he was taking it like a man when something went wrong. The caribou took off through a window and Pete followed. He was with a caribou band for a while, then headed south. Perhaps a buck deer has a homing instinct, or maybe he just was looking for warmer weather, who knows? That's the last we heard of him. But," Buck concluded with conviction in his voice, "if some trapper or miner has been missing tobacco, and if some mysterious animal that can unlatch a cabin door with its horns, has been eating the man's wife's potted plants, chances are it's Panhandle Pete."

Buck Seaton could see that Ralston was interested. The reporter smoked in silence for several minutes, his eyes taking in Mount Rainier's grandeur, the timbered lower country and brawling stream. Trucks rumbled over the highway—getting the park roads in condition for the coming heavy traffic.

"Miners and trappers in British Columbia, the Yukon country and Alaska tune in on the radio," Ralston said. "Why not ask the Panhandle Pete query in one of the broadcasts carrying news edited exclusively for the north country? You might get trace of the deer."

"If you can put it across, go ahead," Buck urged. "We'd sure like him back here in the park if he's still alive. And I know this, Pete will be anxious to return."

"Now about the picture of the hibernating bear?" Ralston asked. "The big story, of course, will be Panhandle Pete, but a short piece about the bear will fit nicely into my editor's plans."

"Come along," Buck invited. He led off at a brisk pace, followed by Ralston, and a dour individual burdened with a camera, and a case containing flash bulbs, films and light meters. His name was Ace Caulkins.

BUCK crossed a log over a foaming creek of snow water, pushed through wet brush and finally stopped before an opening in a cedar snag. The sod and moss in the immediate area had not been disturbed in a long time. "Are you sure she's in there?" Ralston inquired.

"If Old Lady Riley had come out you'd find the skunk cabbages chewed up," Buck Seaton answered. "A bear likes to start the new year with salad." He got down on his knees and peered into the gloomy opening. A fire had burned out much of the interior. It made a nice, dry den and generations of bears had used it. Old Lady Riley had tossed out the previous occupant a number of years ago by taking possession ahead of her, then clawing her nose every time she tried to enter the den to start something. "Yep," Buck reported with satisfaction, "she's in there. By golly, she's got a couple of cubs. Of course she doesn't know it. She's still asleep."

Ralston turned a flashlight into the den. "Son of a gun!" he exclaimed. "Damned if she hasn't."

Perhaps Old Lady Riley was awakened by the flashlight and decided it was the sun shining. She blinked several times, then closed her eyes and stretched. Like human beings, she hated getting up.

Ace Caulkins set up his camera, then projected a tiny beam of light onto Old Lady Riley's shoulder. He focused on the point where the light struck the bear's heavy coat. It was a good job, and he was sure he would have an unusual photograph.

He fussed with the flash bulb gear for several minutes, then was ready. "I'll probably take two or three," he said. "I don't want to miss a chance like this." A moment later the bulb exploded.

Old Lady Riley not only thought that the sun was up, but she concluded, in her dazed state, that the sun was coming into the den. Sound logic told her there wasn't room for the sun and herself in cramped quarters. She emerged with a frightened growl. She wasn't exactly charging. Rather she was covering the shortest distance between two points—a straight line. Caulkins saw her coming, and turned to reach for his camera to save its possible destruction. The next second furry arms held him in a crushing embrace, and his hands were clutching at the air.

"Don't fight back," Buck Seaton yelled. "She's only kidding. She just wants to wrestle. Let her win the first fall."

"If I know Ace," Ralston said in a frightened voice, "there'll be no second fall. The bear will win by default." He caught up the flashlight gear, inserted a new bulb, changed the film, turned the camera toward Caulkins and pressed the button.

Old Lady Riley threw Caulkins into the creek, and waited. In her younger days when she performed as a wrestling bear, that was part of the act. She was merely going into her routine. This was instinctive on the bear's part, because she was somewhat confused over the swift transition from hibernation to the resumption of normal life. Her former owner would have returned and continued the match, and finally Old Lady Riley would have pretended to lose the fall. Caulkins stood in the icy stream, ready to cross to the other side and climb a tree if the bear started after him.

She watched him briefly, then sniffed the air and caught the inviting skunk cabbage odor. Ralston regarded her dubiously, then risked taking a couple of pictures of the cubs.

"What I have to do in the newspaper business—" Caulkins complained.

"Head for my cabin and dry out," Buck Seaton suggested. He caught up the press photographer's gear and started off at a trot, followed by Ralston.

The photographs and the story made the front page. The shot of Old Lady Riley tossing Caulkins into the creek was perfect. With this publicity as a spearhead, it was no trick at all to get the Panhandle story on the Alaskan news broadcast.

When Ralston arrived at his desk the following morning there were two radiograms waiting for him.

Anchorage, Alaska. Have flown over most of Alaska during the past six months and have failed to see Panhandle Pete. *Jack Jefford.*

Cold Deck, Alaska. In my personal plane, the Claim-Jumper, have made several trips to area where Panhandle Pete was last seen. Made inquiry of miners. No trace of Pete. Sorry.
No-Shirt McGee.

On the newscast that night, reference was made to the interest expressed in the missing deer and his love for tobacco. Old Man Hogan, a miner on the Yukon-British Columbia border had missed the first broadcast, partly because his radio battery was down, and he hadn't tuned in for several days, but mostly because he had been out hunting camp meat.

A strong breeze had kept his wind charger turning over at top speed and the battery was strong once more. He listened, with slowly changing expression, until the newscast was finished, then he slapped his leg. "Holy K. Smoke!" he exclaimed. "That must've been the big buck deer I was hunting yesterday! Well, if it was, I'm glad I missed him."

Twice he had fired at the buck. The first time he thought the deer was charging him. He had been smoking. Now that he recalled details, he had been upwind at the time. Normally a deer would have caught his scent and taken off in panic. But this deer had come *toward* him. He had fired hastily, and missed. The buck had whirled and plunged into the nearest thicket. He had caught a brief glimpse a few seconds later and fired again. After that, all he heard was the thunder of hooves, which slowly diminished.

"If that *is* Panhandle Pete, and what other buck deer in these parts would approach a man smoking tobacco, then," he mused, "I should get on the good side of

him. Hell, if he's a tame deer, I might be able to use him. I wonder if he could be used as a pack-horse? I tried to make a pack animal out of a caribou once and nearly got killed. Golly Moses!" he exclaimed, as the possibilities dawned, "I might be able to get out of the country. If I do, then I'll do the right thing by him. I'll see that he gets back to Rainier National Park."

Early the next morning he took a wide swing through the country. At different points, he smoked a cigarette, then dropped the butt. Sooner or later, he hoped, the deer would drift along the game trail and the test would be made. He climbed a nearby ridge which commanded a view of the trail and watched the area through binoculars.

Two hours passed before a thicket stirred. A deer had approached from the other side without warning. Now the buck's antlers were visible. To the inexperienced eye the antlers blended perfectly with sticks and branches in the thicket. The buck emerged and sauntered along the trail. Suddenly his pace increased. In a series of bounds he reached the nearest cigarette. A moment later he was chewing it. He went on to the next, then doubled back to pick up a cigarette the miner had accidentally dropped.

"That's him, sure as hell!" Old Man Hogan said. "But how did he get way down here? Like as not he drifted south as he browsed. I wonder if he'll remember I'm the cuss that shot at him?"

He lit a cigarette and waited. The buck was a long time making up his mind. Hogan was sure the scent had reached the animal's nostrils because he kept pointing his nose toward him and sniffing. He waited patiently in spite of a growing chill from inactivity. At times he wanted to laugh at the buck's extreme caution. Finally the deer stood in front of him. "Hello, Pete," he said.

The deer stretched his neck toward the miner, as if afraid to risk the remainder of his body. Hogan flipped a half-smoked cigarette onto the ground. The buck sniffed from a safe distance, then put a hoof onto the fag, extinguishing the flame. He sniffed again, licked up the fag with his tongue and consumed it with relish.

"No doubt of it now," Hogan exclaimed. "You're Panhandle Pete. And as it isn't the time of year when bucks charge everything in sight, I'll take a chance on you. He held out a piece of cigarette and started for his cabin. A hundred yards down the trail he dropped the butt, which the buck promptly picked up. In this manner he led the deer to his cabin.

He went inside, built a fire, cooked himself a meal which he ate, then with boots off he relaxed and lighted one of several pipes. A few minutes later the door slowly opened and a spread of antlers came through the doorway.

"Now just a minute," Hogan said. "This is going too far. Get the hell out of here."

The buck's neck stretched, and he deftly picked off a flower growing in a pot near the stove. It was one of several that brightened the cabin, and which Hogan raised by keeping the cabin warm regardless of temperature outside.

Stealing the plant, opening the door, and otherwise proving familiarity with cabins and humans convinced Hogan beyond the shadow of a doubt that Panhandle Pete of Longmire's, Rainier National Park was his guest.

He put in the next morning cutting and carrying evergreen branches to a snow-covered bench a quarter mile above his cabin. Once he had dreamed of building the only landing strip in a vast section of the country. He had started clearing away trees and brush on the bench, but a month's work had convinced him it was too big a job for a lone man. What with the roots and stumps, plus rocks and holes in the ground, he realized that it called for bulldozers.

Planes came over frequently, dropping mail and newspapers and following the bush pilot trait of keeping an eye on old men in remote areas. He put in a hard afternoon arranging the branches to form an abbreviated message visible to passing pilots. It read:

PAN. PETE O. K. HERE

A couple of days later a plane streaked over his cabin, dropped a packet of mail and newspapers, cleared the bench by a nice margin, banked and returned. Hogan grinned. "Saw my message out of the corner of his eye," he mused, "and came back for a check. I hope he gets what I mean."

He kept rather close to his radio for the

next few nights and was rewarded when the newscaster's voice said, "Panhandle Pete has been located in a remote area near the British Columbia border. What happens next, no one knows, but it is nice to know that the deer is alive. A miner, Old Man Hogan, got word to a passing pilot. Rainier National Park tourists may see him this year, or he may never know his old haunts. It is in the laps of the gods. However, a new buck deer has taken over Panhandle Pete's job of mooching cigarettes from tourists, according to Ranger Buck Seaton. 'He is larger than Pete,' Buck reports, 'but he isn't as handsome. And he isn't Pete!' "

"I wonder how Pete would like the idea of finding another buck in his place?" Old Man Hogan mused when the broadcast was over. "He don't look to me like a deer that would take it layin' down. I'd kinda like to see it."

SEVERAL days later Pete found himself snubbed to a tree. With profound respect for his hooves, which could strike out in several directions at once, Old Man Hogan approached with a saddle contrived of parts of pack saddles intended for mules.

He loaded a fifty-pound rock on each saddle bag, and made certain the weight was evenly distributed. He released the buck, and all hell broke loose. When Pete realized that he couldn't buck off the load, he calmed down. "That's the stuff," Old Man Hogan said. "Have a cigarette?"

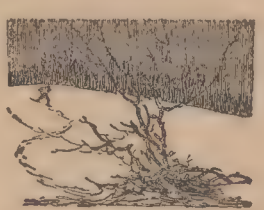
A week of training followed. Pete, being intelligent, soon realized what was expected and cooperated. Tobacco, of course, was his reward. There was nothing original in Old Man Hogan's training methods. Animal trainers use it constantly—reward for something well done. With the prospector's natural patience, good results were assured.

"Now, Pete," Old Man Hogan said one morning, "right now the odds against you're getting home, with my help, are plenty long. A lot can happen, and plenty of things must. But if you stick to me you may not wear diamonds, but I'll hang a daisy chain of cigarettes around your neck, and buy you a ticket home. And not only that, I'll let 'em know ahead of time so the folks can put on a celebration. That ought to go over swell with a conceited cuss like you."

If Pete didn't understand the words, he understood the tone, and he remained meekly at the snubbing tree while the old miner loaded on his precious outfit. There was ammunition for camp meat, but the load was mostly bacon, beans, flour, sugar, coffee and minor items. They presented an odd picture, Hogan leading the way followed by the big buck. While the man had confidence in the animal, nevertheless he was taking no chances on Pete suddenly bolting and taking the outfit with him. In his hand he held a light line which was fastened to a knot holding the load. At the slightest jerk, the ropes holding the load in place would be released. The first leap Pete made in his getaway would dump the outfit.

Day after day they pushed through rugged country. Sometimes they followed frozen streams to the headwaters, struggled through snowy passes, then went on, following another stream into a valley. Old Man Hogan, fearing the consequences if his tobacco supply ran out, put himself on rations that made him curse himself and his luck generally. Tobacco was necessary to his good humor, but he realized that Panhandle Pete worked all day for a little bit at night.

Late one afternoon they stopped on the edge of a swamp. "Pete, you ain't goin' to like this," the miner said. "First we have to cross three miles of frozen swamp water and muck. Then we come to Sucker Creek. It's in that draw and it empties into this swamp country. It's called Sucker Creek, not



because it's full of suckers, but because any miner is a sucker to try and prospect it. Some of 'em have bogged down in the swamp and died. Others have been driven crazy by mosquitoes. Only one man ever came out with gold. He done the impossible —come over a glacier in the mountains after a hard winter; he made plenty of snow bridges over the crevasses. His name was Barney the Horse, because he could carry so much grub. He got enough gold in a week to last him a lifetime, but he danged

near starved to death before the freeze-up come so he could cross the swamp. He took a shine to me and told me how to pack in over the glacier. But I never got a cold enough winter to make the snow bridges safe."

Panhandle Pete registered interest. All his life he had heard humans talk. He knew that they did a lot of it, and he understood certain sounds brought results. If he got into the Seaton vegetable garden and Mary Seaton screamed, "Darn you, Pete. Get out!" he knew he had better take off. Otherwise she would bash him with a broom, or throw clods at him.

"Of course you don't know what I'm talkin' about," Old Man Hogan continued, "but as long as I'm goin' back into civilization again, *if* I find enough gold, I've got to practice talkin'. Barney the Horse always figgered a man might go over the swamp ice to the creek, but he never tried it hisself. There're hotsprings in the swamps and the ice might be too thin."

Crossing the swamp was a hair-raising business. Whenever the ice started cracking Hogan detoured and tried again. At frequent intervals he knocked off hunks of frozen muck from the high points and made markers that would show him the way out.

A mile from the spot where Barney the Horse had taken out his fortune, the swamp narrowed and presently was lost in canyon walls. Hogan reasoned there was no further danger from hotsprings and followed a direct course. He saw rotting stumps, a sure indication men had cut fuel and shelter timber, and slowed down. "I guess that's what's left of Barney's old cabin," he mused, sizing up a heap of poles partly drifted over with snow.

It was a logical place to build even a temporary shelter. Wind would sweep the heavy snows into the gulch, saving a man the problem of continually digging out. "I guess we're here, Pete," he concluded. "Any way, I'll unpack."

A TARP served as a temporary shelter for man and his outfit. As usual Pete was turned loose to shift for himself, Hogan being confident the buck would return as long as tobacco held out. And when Pete shifted for himself, he grew fat and sassy. During the days that followed he would be gone for hours, but sooner or later Hogan would see him standing on a nearby ridge, or making his way into the canyon for a tobacco ration.

Old Man Hogan's experienced eyes told him several things. First somewhere among the peaks a ledge of gold was breaking up as the surrounding rock decayed under constant erosion. The gold, thus freed, was brought down by melting snows and hard rains. He shrewdly concluded that Barney had found a concentration, otherwise he would not have taken out so much in so brief a time. Such a concentration suggested that a dike of rock, crossing the stream, served as a giant riffle which caught the gold in the same manner that man-made riffles caught gold in sluice boxes.

He wasted no time driving test holes through the ice, but examined the bank until formations indicated such a dike existed. He went to work with pick and shovel, breaking the ice into slabs and tossing it out. When he was down six feet, he dug steps in the ice. After that he carried the slabs to the surface. At a depth of fifteen feet he struck gravel. This was cold country and the stream had frozen solid.

He now widened the area, then built a wood fire in the center. The heat, of course, would melt the icy walls, but the water itself would aid in the thawing. His problem was to prevent it from putting out the fire. As rapidly as the gravel thawed, he cut tiny ditches to drain it off to a low spot from which it could be dipped with a bucket. The gravel itself contained a heavy water content which was released as it thawed.

When the bucket wasn't used for bailing, Hogan had it over a fire heating water for the gold pan. The gravel began freezing almost as soon as he brought it up and panning was a hot water job. He lost fine gold in the process, but a pile of nuggets grew slowly. They were but slightly worn and showed little mineral stain—proof that they had not traveled far.

He was still thawing with fire, digging and panning with hot water when the weather suddenly changed. It began raining in the lower country. "I'll be drowned out as soon as water starts runnin' over the ice," he fumed. "Mebbe I should get the

hell out of the country right now. Still, the pay's gettin' better, and the main concentration can't be far off."

He changed his tactics, carrying buckets of gravel to high ground as soon as it was thawed. The warm rain kept it thawed out. He was driving himself hard in this race against the break-up—driving himself too hard for one of his years. "I got enough to pay me and Pete's way out to Seattle," he reflected as he worked, "and there'll be enough left over to keep me goin' a year. What I need is gold that'll last as long as I live. I won't get another chance like this."

The dump grew. He improvised a dike of tailings and muck around the shaft, then cut small trees and put them upstream to take the brunt of the water. Built in the form of a V, the dike was designed to split the water. It was snowing and freezing upstream and this gave him extra days. When the warm wind and rain came from the south he growled, "Chinook," and crawled out. Water was breaking through the dike as he hauled up the final bucket. It was unusually heavy and the muck was almost yellow in spots. "I'm all tuckered out," he grumbled as he emptied the bucket onto his dump, "but I've got to pan this stuff."

He panned until seven the following morning and stuffed the last of the gold into moose-hide pokes. His fingers were stiff and blue with cold. Panhandle Pete, standing nearby, blurred, grew clear, then blurred again. Things began swimming. Setting his jaws, Old Man Hogan stirred the fire, made himself some scalding tea which he downed. He was too exhausted to eat, so he crawled into his sleeping bag to get several hours' rest. He closed his eyes and muttered, "Must be close to thirty thousand dollars' worth. Quite a load for a man of my years and a buck deer. He's strong. We'll make it."

When he awakened it was night and at first he couldn't understand, then he realized that he had slept throughout the day. He groaned as his outraged muscles protested. Slowly he crawled out of the bag and stamped around, loosening up. The tarp had kept off the rain, and the high ground was above the water slowly spreading over the ice and frozen creek bank.

He built a new fire, ate a hot meal, then considered the situation. It was bad. Climbing out of the canyon was impossible. He had to go downstream to the swamp, then cross over the flooded ice to high ground. After that, if he survived, it was a matter of following game trails on high ground.

"Pete," he said, "if I get out of this alive, you'll get the credit. I'll never forget it! You'll go to Rainier National Park in style.

"I'll hire a band, by golly. And if I don't get out alive, well—they don't come no tougher'n you. You'll survive until some cuss who is a better rifle shot than I am comes along."

HE LOADED Pete with everything because he felt that a four-legged animal had a better chance of remaining upright than a two-legged one. He was afraid that if he went down, with a pack on his back, he wouldn't get up again.

As long as they kept to the ice, Old Man Hogan knew that there was no danger of falling into holes because ice freezes level. The danger lay in stepping onto a thawed area and breaking through.

They followed the edge of the stream nearly a mile before it was necessary to cross. He didn't relish the prospect, but snow water was tumbling over a cliff and he had no desire to walk under what amounted to a slush falls.

Pete waded into the stronger water and turned back. "You gotta go, Pete," Hogan insisted, "It's our only chance. Okay!" Again Pete turned back. The third time he started at an angle. Halfway across, Old Man Hogan's feet were swept from under him. He held onto a pack rope and Pete staggered and went to his knees.

The miner tried to regain his feet, but the current was too strong. His only chance lay in clinging to the pack rope. Pete got up, only to be dragged down again. The buck whistled in fury, a strange sound, audible even above the roar of the flood. A wave of water carried them a hundred yards, then Pete's front hooves dug in. With a mighty effort he lunged toward the bank, dragging the man with him. As soon as Hogan reached smoother water, he got to his feet. He was breathing hard and for several moments he leaned against the buck, gasping, "The damned fool chances men will take for gold."

A mile of water separated them from the

nearest land. "Okay, Pete," he said wearily, "you know as much about this as I do, get goin', son."

Old Man Hogan's mind grew a little hazy from exposure and exhaustion during the trek to high ground. He had a rope looped about his waist, which was dangerous because if the deer had stampeded he probably would have been dragged to death. But he reasoned it was a case of risking death by drowning or dragging.

He reeled out of the flooded swamp, let go of the rope, and sprawled under the branches of a big tree. Rain hadn't touched the ground beneath and it was still frozen. For several minutes he lay gasping, then by sheer will-power he tore loose several dead branches and put them around a candle. He added fragments of bark and slivers broken off when he gathered the wood. Then he lighted the candle. It ignited the wood and he removed the candle and saved it for future use. He piled on the wood, then dragged off his gum boots and emptied icy water out of them.

He warmed his feet, dried out his clothing and spent the rest of the day rebuilding his reserve strength. He gave Pete two cigarettes—whole ones. This was no time for rationing.

The mountains ahead and the valleys he knew lay between them were enough to take the heart out of a man, but he was conscious of a sense of triumph. He had raided the gold hoard and survived. He would continue to survive.

Man and deer plodded slowly along the bank of a stream that flowed, generally north. It grew smaller, became a trickle spilling from a snowbank. Pete fed himself, but Old Man Hogan lived mostly on camp meat his rifle provided, and the grub that moved on Pete's back. They bucked their way through a mountain pass at night when a drop in temperature tightened up the snow and made travel easier. Old Man Hogan kept sniffing, telling himself he hoped to smell salt air. Sometimes he thought he smelled it, but his horse sense told him he was deceiving himself. Salt air was a long way off. There were other passes, with streams spilling into lakes that were nameless—and into lakes that were known.

"Pete," he said at last, "from now on, we've got the world by the tail and a downhill pull. See that stream? It flows into the Pacific Ocean." Pete sniffed and took a drink. He had thrived on the experience, but Old Man Hogan was as thin as a rail.

Several days later they emerged onto the first man-made trail either had seen in many months. "That's the road to Telegraph Creek, Pete. The tough going is behind us, son."

THEY came slowly into the remote settlement and Old Man Hogan caught up a club and threatened the dogs that were moving in on Pete. One ducked the club and the next second Pete's antlers had tossed him ten feet into the air. He had his tail between his legs and was yipping and running before his feet hit the ground. The others retreated to a respectful distance.

Old Man Hogan's eyes took in details—the little group of buildings; the Stikine River that split a mountain range in its successful efforts to reach salt water; and the cemetery high on the hill, where natives still placed some of the departed's belongings on the grave. He went directly to the trading post, turned in his gold, got credit for it, then asked, "When's the next boat for Wrangell?"

"There's a boat due tomorrow. It'll leave the following morning, and unless it gets hung up on some bar, should make connections with a southbound steamer at Wrangell," the trader answered. "What about that deer? If something isn't done, either the dogs will kill him or he'll kill the dogs."

"Ever hear of Panhandle Pete of Rainier National Park?" The trader nodded. "That's him. And that reminds me. Gimme a carton of cigarettes."

The trader gave him the carton and Old Man Hogan went outside and fed Pete three packs, a cigarette at a time, while whites, natives and breeds stared in astonishment.

The trader emptied a storeroom and put Pete in it for safe-keeping, while Hogan went to the little hotel, bought himself a square meal of Chechako grub, then crawled between sheets and slept twelve hours.

When he awakened, the trader came over and reported that the riverboat was lining her way up through the rapids. "Call me when they're taking passengers aboard,"

Old Man Hogan muttered, then turned over and went to sleep for another six hours.

When he got up they were unloading the steamer and a scow that she had pushed up ahead of her. The skipper greeted Hogan with a dubious expression. "I hear you plan to ship out a deer, Hogan. I can see trouble ahead. There must be some kind of a law about shipping live game out of British Columbia. In fact, having game captive must be against the law. They won't let you do it."

"The hell they won't!" Old Man Hogan exclaimed. "Panhandle Pete is an American citizen just passing through Canadian territory. There's no law against that."

"Hmmm. But will the custom's man at the border believe that?" the skipper argued. "Now if he was a beaver pelt, legally taken, you could pay the export duty and they'd fix a seal to the pelt and everything would be okay."

"Well, let's get him aboard and we'll see what happens."

"That's another thing. How'll he act?"

"Like a gentleman," Hogan retorted. "I've never seen so much horsin' around. For two cents I'd go back to the bush where a man don't come up against fool laws every time he turns around."

HE BROUGHT Pete aboard shortly before sailing time, and the deer was securely snubbed. Getting upstream is a matter of two or three days, depending on the strength of the water, the snags and depth. Going down is a matter of keeping the steamer off of river bars. Eight or nine hours after they left Telegraph Creek they were tied up and a Canadian official was aboard.

"Hello, what have we here?" he exclaimed when he saw Pete. "Unless you have a special permit, Mr. Hogan, you can't hold a deer in captivity, and certainly you cannot export him."

"If he was dead I could take him out, couldn't I?" Hogan demanded.

"Well, if you had a hunting license," the official replied, "and he had been killed in the open season. But you have only a miner's permit to hunt for camp meat. Also the season is closed, so even if your deer played dead you'd be in trouble. Now the best way out of this is to release him."

"That deer is Panhandle Pete, an American citizen, native of the State of Washington, permanent residence, Longmire, Rainier National Park," Old Man Hogan said. "He's a tourist, returnin' from Alaska, via Yukon Territory and British Columbia."

"Is he carrying identification with him?"

"I suppose you want something to show he's a registered voter, or mebbe birth certificate?"

"Naturally not, but you'll save yourself a lot of trouble by releasing him," the official said. "Otherwise, I shall have to seize him."

"That'd be a dirty trick," Old Man Hogan grumbled. "If you'll just be reasonable and look the other way, in a week's time he'll be back home. He won't be happy up here. No deer of his breed around to yard up with—just a lone wolf."

He realized that the official was going to be firm. He did some careful thinking, then lit a cigarette. As he approached the buck, Pete sniffed and looked hopeful. "Sorry, Pete, but we're all snarled up in red tape. You should pack a birth certificate around with you. And I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut the Rainier Park folks would come through with one if we had the time. So, I'm turning you loose."

He led the deer to a point near the bow and suddenly threw his weight against Pete's side and the next second Pete was in the river. He swam to the bank, shook the water from his coat and gave Old Man Hogan a puzzled look. The old man continued to smoke and the odor reached Pete's nostrils. The steamer cast off lines and started downstream. Pete plunged into the nearest thicket and the old miner's heart sank.

The steamer rounded the next bend and Pete stood on a bar eyeing Old Man Hogan hopefully. "Well, skipper," he said, "it's your move. I gambled on him tryin' to follow the scent of burnin' tobacco. For a few minutes I figgered I'd lost."

The skipper put the steamer's bow against the bar.

A deckhand tossed a rope over the buck's antlers, and with much heaving by all hands, Pete came aboard. He stamped and snorted until Hogan gave him a pack of cigarettes. "Next stop, Wrangell," the skipper said. "I wonder what'll happen there?"

"So do I," Old Man Hogan said. "Things just naturally happen around this cuss."

NOTHING happened at Wrangell after they had scared off the malemutes and huskies. Old Man Hogan sent a message to Ralston which read:

PANHANDLE PETE ARRIVING BY STEAMER TUESDAY. HIRE A BAND. ARRANGE TRUCK FOR LONGMIRE'S TRIP. HOGAN.

Old Man Hogan slept and ate most of the time on the trip to Seattle. Eating four meals a day and sleeping twelve hours, which included an afternoon nap, he began putting on weight. The ship's barber trimmed his mustache, shaved his beard and removed a pound of hair from his head. He was quite a respectable-looking gentleman when the ship docked.

It was seven o'clock in the morning, but quite a number of people were on hand. Ralston climbed over the rail and asked for Hogan. "I'm Hogan," the old miner said.

"Aw, hell," the newspaperman grumbled, "you're all slicked up. I'd hoped you'd have your miner's clothes on, whiskers and all that. I wanted a shot of Pete and you just as you came from the bush."

"I got it," Old Man Hogan answered. "I hired a fellow at Wrangell to take it." He produced several glossy-finished photographs that were works of art.

Ralston almost drooled. A truck rumbled up and a band struck up something about hailing the conquering hero. Banners on the truck read, "Welcome Home, Panhandle Pete."

"He's headline news," Ralston said. "One of the newsreel boys is waiting."

The first mate came up. "I guess we'd better unload your deer first," he said. "He just tore the shirt and some hide off of a sailor trying to steal tobacco out of his pocket. The sailors like him, but what with his horns and hooves he takes up too much room. He can kick in every direction. We'll have to get a sling around his middle. He won't like that, so maybe you'd better come down and help out."

"No, he won't like that kind of treatment," Old Man Hogan agreed.

"But it will make swell pictures," Ralston said.

They went below where Pete stood, well snubbed, under an open hatch. A sling was ready and Hogan slipped it under Pete's belly and made the ends secure above his back. A sailor cautiously slipped a chain hook through the sling, and the winchman took in the slack. A moment later Pete grunted heavily as he was lifted through the hatch high above deck, and swung over the side. They held him there while Old Man Hogan hurried to the pier. They rightly sensed someone who knew Pete must be on hand to quiet his indignation.

A cigarette turned the trick while bulbs exploded and a newsreel camera ground away. The band was ready to strike up again, but Old Man Hogan stopped it. "He's got nerves, boys, so let's not crowd this deal too much."

Pete's hooves touched the truck while he was still chewing the cigarette. Old Man Hogan cautiously released the sling while a longshoreman snubbed the buck.

"Now, here's the program," Ralston said. "While he rates a Chamber of Commerce banquet, we're afraid he wouldn't appretiate it, so we're going directly to Longmire's. A reception committee of rangers, park officials and tourists is on hand. Pete's return sort of solves a problem, or maybe it complicates things."

"What do you mean?"

"Until you got word that Pete was alive, another buck was being groomed to take his place," Ralston explained. "We were holding a contest for a name for the new buck.

The committee received hundreds of suggestions and is now deadlocked on Billy the Kid, Wild Bill Hickok and Roughhouse Eddie. One school feels that we should go ahead, decide on a name and have *two* bucks at Longmire's. The other school of thought argues that there might be—confusion."

Old Man Hogan smiled grimly. "Pete and me crossed a lot of bridges together," he said sagely, "only there weren't no bridges. But we didn't cross any of 'em until we come to 'em."

"I guess we'll leave it that way," Ralston said.

A motorcycle escort picked up the truck on the waterfront and roared through town with sirens going. Pete tossed his head and looked right noble. "He's a born ham," Ralston said. "He's eating this stuff up in chunks."

The band hurried on ahead, and as they approached the park entrance a carload of newsreel men overtook them. The ranger at the entrance came out, grinning. "Well, Pete, you big lug, you're back again," he said. "I wish you'd kept a diary. It'd be thrilling reading. Things are about the same here—improved roads, more people, perhaps, but the old mountain don't change much. Nisqually Glacier has retreated a few yards. Buck and Mary Seaton are still on the job. I'll be seeing you."

The power of the press being what it is, quite a crowd was on hand at Longmire's. Buck and Mary climbed onto the truck, and she exclaimed, "Buck, I think he remembers us! Pete, you old darling!" She hugged him. He seemed to take this demonstration of affection as his due. Buck slapped his neck a couple of times and looked over his coat for scars. He found several.

The band finished a stirring number and Buck Seaton made a welcoming speech. Old Lady Riley and two cubs prowled near the outskirts of the crowd. Chipmunks and squirrels scampered about full of business.

A thicket on the edge of the dense forest stirred and a handsome buck stepped into view. He carried himself with the triumph of one who had never known defeat and was, indeed, monarch of all he surveyed. With a touch of arrogance he pushed his way through the crowd and nipped an unlighted cigarette from a girl's fingers. Then he saw Panhandle Pete. He snorted, stamped his hooves and registered displeasure.

At the same moment Pete saw him. Rage filled the buck. This intruder was stamping the same pavement he had stamped, mooching cigarettes from the same kind of people that had supplied him in the past. What was more, he was picking up admiring glances at the very moment when Pete occupied the stage.

"And so," Buck Seaton concluded, "on behalf of the personnel of Rainier National Park, and the thousands of tourists who have visited us in the past, and will revisit us in the future; on behalf of those yet to meet you, I welcome you home, Pete. Instead of the key to the park, which you would never appreciate, I give you this packet of cigarettes."

Then under his breath he muttered, "*Now* what the hell? You never turned down tobacco before."

He cut the rope snubbing Pete and stepped aside. It was well he did so. Pete left the truck in a single bound, scattering people in panic. The leap gave him momentum, which he increased with each leap.

The other buck saw him coming and turned a split second too late. Pete's head caught him in the side and bent him almost double. With legs driving, Pete knocked him over a bank and into the nearby stream. The buck got up, shook himself, whistled defiance, then looked at Pete squaring off for another charge. With a graceful leap, the buck left the stream and disappeared into the forest. After all, he reasoned, Rainier is a big park, with other entrances where people appear.

"What action!" a cameraman exclaimed. "And I didn't have to go to India or Darkest Africa to get it, either."

Pete looked over the crowd, then with mincing steps and his old, lovable arrogance, he approached a girl lighting a cigarette. She closed her lighter and handed him the fag. Panhandle Pete was home again and had everything under control.

A Gunman's Friend

By CADDO CAMERON

"Ten Years Ago, I Was a Kid; Just a Gun-Slingin' Fool"

A LONG time back I heard an old gunfighter declare that he carried his best friend in his holster. I was just a kid and that old scalawag's remark went over big with me, but since then I've learned that his medicine was bad—mighty bad. Of course, a man's gun *can* be a friend. But, on the average, I claim that it's the kind of a friend another old boy was talkin' about when he said, "God save me from my friends, I can protect myself from my enemies."

My guns have caused me a heap of misery. But to be fair, I have to admit that they did have somethin' to do with makin' me one of the best friends a man ever had. I mean Deputy United States Marshal Heck Henderson. You've heard me speak of him, but I never did tell you about the first time I tangled with Old Heck, did I? Well, that was ten year ago when I was just a kid a-startin' out, and—

It happens like this.

Whenever a young rooster growin' his first set of spurs comes to me and asks me to teach him the fine points of slingin' a gun good and fast, I won't do it and I tell him that he'll be a sight better off if he never learns how. Knowin' how is what made a wanted man out of me. Ever since my dad whittled out my first crossbow and I busted Mama's one and only lookin' glass with the thing, guns have been dealin' me grief, but I've been a fool for 'em regardless. Not because I particularly wanted to hurt anything with a gun. I simply couldn't keep my hands off'n a shootin'-iron

and I spent a heap more time a-practicin' the quick draw with Dad's old cap-and-ball six-shooter than I ever did a-studyin' how to read and write and figger. So what happens? By the time I get away from home among strangers I'm right proud of my gun-savvy and don't never miss a chance to show it off in a harmless way, and before long some folks are callin' me a gunsharp and I believe it myself. That's when my troubles really commence.

Along the Texas border and up and down the cattle trails where I'm a-workin', stock gunmen are thick as rattlers in the brush and a lot of 'em are powerful jealous of their reputations, so when they hear about a kid who is sorta makin' a name for himself these old-timers hunt him down and try him out just to see how good he really is. I'm lucky, mighty lucky as far as these shootin' scrapes are concerned. But my good luck turns out to be bad luck. After holdin' my own with a few of the badmen I get so dadblamed salty I won't never eat crow or run from nothin' or nobody. Up to that time I ain't tangled with the law none. Then I go and pistol whip a cuss with money and a political pull and pretty soon he sends a bunch of his tough hands down to Drumm and Draper's horse camp on Owl Prairie to hang me. I could've got away from 'em all right, but I'm too cussed to run. So I shoot it out with the bunch and when I leave there the law is on my trail and I've *got* to run, and I dasn't stop runnin' until I've crossed the Red and gone north clean up to the Osage Nation.

OF COURSE, I didn't have any ambition to be a badman with a bounty on my hair. So I write back to a fella in Texas and ask him to find out whether there's any chance for me to square myself with the law down there 'cause I'm a-hankerin' to come home. He tells me that I've still got plenty friends in Texas, but the law ain't one of 'em. He says that the cuss who'd taken the pistol whippin' has raised so much Cain and spent so much money he's got every lawman in the state on my trail and besides, I'm now gettin' credit for damned nigh every unsolved robbery and killin' that happens in Texas. He winds up by tellin' me that I'm always described as "extremely dangerous" and the order has gone out to "Shooot to kill on sight." That's a stiff jolt for a kid to take and even now, ten years later when I'm bone-seasoned and plumb hardened, I ain't noways ashamed to admit it. Up to that time my guns sure hadn't been my best friends.

Until a man has been there he can't imagine how it feels to find himself on the wrong end of the order, "Shoot to kill on sight." Ever been on a wolf hunt? Well, when a bunch of riders circle one of those big gray lobos and go to squeezin' down on him, first thing he does is to run and hunt cover. That's nature in man or wolf. Then he hears and feels the circle a-drawin' tighter and he goes to dartin' here and there lookin' for a weak spot and he don't find none, and every time he shows his head he gets shot at, until pretty soon he's wild with fear like a mustang a-fightin' its first rope and his nerves are so tight they're fit to snap and his muscles twitch at the slightest sound so that he'll change ends if a cricket so much as chirrups behind him, and his senses are nine times keener than they ever were so that he sees and hears things that he never heard or saw before. Some of these things ain't real, either.

He gets meaner and meaner until he's more vicious than even a wolf is by nature, and he snarls and snaps at everything that touches him—twig, weed or anything—and before long you can see that he's a-hatin' the world and all that's in it. By now he's so full of hate he's a-hatin' himself, too. As the circle draws tighter and tighter and he's tried and tried and can't get through it, he feels it a-chokin' him down and it's hard for him to breathe, and his eyes get bloodshot and his lips draw back from his teeth and there's froth on 'em. A bullet nicks him and he sinks his fangs in the wound. He tears at his own flesh and likes the hurt of it because he's crazy to inflict pain on somebody, even himself, and now he has reached the point where you can shoot him all to pieces and he'll fight you when his back is broke and his hindquarters are dead and a-draggin', and he'll fight you until he's dead all over. Some men get to be like that. *Some* men are part wolf to begin with, but maybe they don't know it and never show it until they hear behind them, the order, "Shoot to kill on sight!"

It was ten year ago when I first heard

that order and I'm a-thinkin' back now. Just a-thinkin' how it sounded then. I'd always been a rollickin' kid, chock full of fun and frolic, but that turned me into a wolf. I buried my real name deep in the hills of the Osage Reservation. (Too bad I didn't bury my guns with it.) Then I got me a long horse and a packhorse and I hit the crooked trail that winds and twists down hill all the way to hell.

After I've staked myself to money and supplies, I build me a hideout in the breaks of the North Canadian—a den, and I winter there. That's the toughest winter in my whole life, before or since. Like a boy with wolf blood in him, I imagine that the circle is a-squeezin' down on me and I ain't got nobody to talk to about it. Time and again I wish I hadn't left my Indian friends, the Osages. The wolf blood in me ain't been circulatin' long enough to kill my hunger for company and by the time the blizzards have stopped their howlin' over my dugout, and ducks and geese are a-headin' north, I know that I can't stand to be alone no longer. To hell with the law and its hunters! I can dodge lead and fight back, but I can't dodge loneliness or fight it good. That's what I was thinkin' ten year ago. I know better now. So I hit for the buffalo range across the line in the Texas Panhandle, a dangerous place for me then.

I'M LUCKY on the range. The first outfit I run onto is a big one owned by Rannicky Joe Harrigan—three wagons, two hunters, six skinners and a Mexican cook. Joe is one of the hunters and Tom West was the other. A few days back Tom got stove up bad in a stampede; they've taken him down to Sweetwater and the doc said he won't work for at least a year, so Rannicky Joe has to do all the killin' and what with other work he can't keep his skinners busy. That was mighty nigh ten year ago, but I'll never forget how Joe tried me out with a rifle.

Mine is a Model 73 Winchester, just a toy on the buffalo range, but I can shoot with the thing. When I've finished Joe looks me up and down right thoughtful, and declares, "I still don't believe what my eyes tell me I seen you do with that there popgun. The buff'ler population is due to catch hell when I turn you a-loose with a brand new Sharp's I've got in the wagon. You hit me for a job a-skinnin' or cookin' or anything, Mister Gunman, but you're a hunter now. I'll quick learn you all you need to know about killin' buff'ler. What name d'you want me to put on my payroll?"

So Rannicky Joe has spotted me as a man on the dodge. I'm a-wonderin' how he did it. I ain't been a wanted man long enough to get used to it, so I must've given myself away somehow or other. It spooks me to think about it. Before I know what I'm doin', I steal a look over my shoulder and all around me.

Harrigan is watchin' me close, and he says, "Names don't mean nothin' on the range, boy. We don't give a damn what all you done before you come here. All that counts is what you do from now on. I called you Mister Gunman, kid, and it shore fits you perfect. What say?"

"That's as good a name as any. Slim for short."

The herd is movin' north now and there's days when the plains are black with buffalo. The bulls are runnin' separate from the cows and calves, which they'll do until the matin' season later on, and we're killin' mostly bulls because their hides fetch a higher price than cows. The boys say the huntin' is fine and Joe swears I waste less powder and lead than any hunter he ever seen. That makes me feel kinda good because, like always, I'm proud of my marksmanship. But, to me, shootin' these big, shaggy, dumb fellas is like bushwhackin' tame cattle and I've worked cows and liked 'em too long to get any fun out of this brand of huntin'. It's plain murder, that's all. I feel like I'm a-wadin' through blood up to my chin and sometimes I dream that I'm goin' down for the third time in the sticky stuff. That usually happens after I've made what the boys call a big kill, anywheres from a hundred to two hundred of these two-thousand-pound beasts without hardly movin' my rest sticks—not because I'm such a good shot, but simply because they ain't got the brains to stampede when they'd ought to.

Harrigan guesses how I feel about this here killin' and he tries to ease my mind by pointin' out that every time we kill a buffalo we make room and save feed for a big beef steer, not to mention the fact that we're do-

in' about the one and only thing that will ever keep the Indians on their reservations and make the country safe for homes and schools and civilization. It's a good-soundin' talk, but I know he don't mean it. What keeps Rannicky Joe on the buffalo range is the money he's makin' and not his love for civilization. He don't like civilization. Fact is, he's been runnin' from it for years and he'll keep on a-runnin' until it finally corners him and corrals him with bob-wire.

But I do like the life out here on the plains and the men I'm a-livin' with. Seems like I'd ought to be able to shake off the feelin' that I'm a circled wolf and keep from watchin' the skyline and stop that ringin' in my ears, "Shoot to kill on sight!" Even in the excitement of makin' a big kill, when I've got 'em bunched and am keepin' 'em thataway, aimin' at and hittin' a spot on their brown hides the size of my hat, low behind the shoulder, watchin' the big fellas stagger when my lead goes home—then stand and shiver and wilt slow like their legs was give out, and often die in their tracks—even when I see all this and my Big Fifty is a-thunderin' in my ear, I can't shed of that "Shoot to kill on sight!"

I've been on the range about a week and it's a clear, sharp night with nothin' but stars overhead. For a wonder there ain't no wind and sound is carryin' far and wide, so that the moan of Juan's guitar and the high-pitched laugh of Jake's fiddle must be makin' music for many an owl, coyote and wolf on the plains tonight. Red heat from our buffalo chip fire is a-warmin' us good. We've scalped the ground and staked out on a dry hide hair-side down and Washita Billy's boots are a-beatin' it hard in the wildest jig you ever seen. I'm a-clappin' time for Washita and the other boys are a-whistlin' or hummin' the tune, and everybody's happy. Everybody except me. We're all young and our bellies are full of strong red meat and we're a-makin' good money for the liquor and girls and gamblers in Dodge and Griffin, so why shouldn't we be happy? That is—everybody except me.

For I'm just a kid and I'm a hunted wolf and I can feel the circle a-tightenin' down on me so that I dasn't take off the two six-shooters I'm a-packin' or set or lie anyways to keep me from gettin' at one or t'other of 'em damned quick, and my ears are reachin' out through the racket and gatherin' in sounds that the others don't hear and I never would have heard before I got to be a hunted wolf, and my eyes are eternally watchin' other things besides Washita's flyin' boots and flailin' arms. My guns made me this way. Don't try to tell me that they're my best friends!

OUR horses are staked close by for fear of Indians. I see one of 'em lift its head and stop its jaws and cock its ears north, and I miss two beats.

"What the hell, Slim!" yells Washita Billy, and everybody gives me the laugh.

Pretty soon the music stops and I hear a horse nicker away off north somewheres. Lookin' around I see that nobody else heard it, but one of our horses did and he whinnies soft.

Rannicky Joe chuckles, and allows, "That's old Hay Foot a-cryin' for his pard, Straw Foot. I forgot and staked 'em a little too far apart tonight."

But I know better. I've been listenin' to a wolf a-howlin' up north and now he has stopped. Coyotes have been yappin' up that way and now they've shut their yappers. Until just a minute ago an old owl was boomin' threats or love talk across the plains at some other owl and now he has stopped.

So I tell the boys, "Somebody comin' from the north."

They quit talkin' and strain their ears. Then they go to pokin' fun at me 'cause *they* don't hear nothin'. All of 'em but Harrigan.

He says, "Don't be too shore about that, boys. Old Slim has got owl eyes and wolf ears."

"And a boa constrictor's body," laughs Washita.

You can't hear a horse's hoofbeats on a carpet of buffalo grass very far off, but let him cross a patch of ground that's been tromped by a herd and rained on and you can hear 'em, if you're a hunted wolf. This horse does now.

And I tell the boys, "He's a-comin' closer right along and his nag is damned nigh petered out."

A short while later the stranger rides into camp. I've moved back between the wagons, out of the firelight, and I see his

horse come a-trottin' up to our horses at more of a hobble than a trot for it's plumb leg-weary and give out. The rider is a-spurrin' it along, but there ain't much strength in his jabs. Then I notice that he has tied himself in the saddle and when his horse stops, he falls forward over the pommel like a man asleep. I hurry out there with the balance of the fellas. We take the stranger down and stretch him out in the light. He's a long, tall boy not more'n two inches shorter'n me and maybe a little older, and his right thigh has been drilled by a bullet. Harrigan thinks it's an old wound that hasn't ever been taken care of, so it has opened up and the poor cuss has fainted from loss of blood. While the other boys are hustlin' around a-fixin' to wash the stranger up and tie him up and bed him down, Rannicky and I look him over good to see if we can find out who he is. Harrigan pulls somethin' bright and shiny from the fella's pants pocket, glances at it, then shoves it back quick without lettin' on. But I seen the thing, too.

It's a Deputy United States Marshal's badge!

Reckon it ain't hard to guess what sight of that damned badge does to me, a more or less green kid gettin' his first experience as a wanted man with bounties on him. "Shoot to kill on sight!" . . . I'd a swore that somebody or somethin' growled that in my ear, then I realize that it's only imagination.

Imagination or not, this ain't no place for me. So I tell Harrigan quiet like, "Shore hate to leave you-all, Joe, but it's time I was gittin' along."

"Don't be a damned fool!" snaps Rannicky. "Wait and see. And besides, Slim, you're young. You'll have to stop runnin' from the law sometime and you can't stop no younger. Why don't you wait and see?"

Wait, hell! A kid won't wait for nothin'. When he gets old he's damned glad to wait and hope for the best, or brace himself for the worst. But a kid will either run from trouble, or go out to meet it. I'm a-thinkin' it over. Then all of a sudden the devil goes to work on me like he did down there on Owl Prairie that time. Run? Huh! I ain't got no call to run from nobody. Ain't nobody can shade *me* with a six-shooter.

"All right, Joe. I'll wait and see."

Rannicky says, "Bully for you, Slim!"

But he's lookin' at my face like he figures maybe I'm somethin' that it ain't safe to touch. He don't know that it's the old gun-fever that gives me this cussed look.

After a while the stranger comes to, then drops off to sleep without more'n half a dozen words. There ain't much sleep for me *that* night and I'm up and out on the range a-stalkin' a band of bulls long before he's awake in the mornin'. Like the devil told me, I'm good today. I can't miss or do anything wrong with a rifle and I make my biggest kill—two hundred five robe hides and I declare you could mighty nigh step from carcass to carcass without ever touchin' the ground. Washita Billy is layin' there with me. He's cleanin' and coolin' one of my Sharp's with water while I'm a-shootin' the other'n.

When the last bull buries his beard in the grass and dies, Billy says hoarse, "God-amighty, Slim! You're poison with a rifle. Are you that good with a short gun?"

"Better!"

The devil shore is a-workin' on me today.

The stranger is up and around when I get back to camp. He looks me over and I look him over. He's a-takin' my measure and I'm a-takin' his'n.

He puts out his hand. "I'm Slim."

I take his hand. "So am I."

WE SHAKE. I see that he's fixed to draw with his left. So am I. Then we set down across from the fire from each other and go to eatin' without another word. Was he afraid to shoot on sight? The devil says that he was and tells me that I'd ought be mighty proud of myself. I am.

The next mornin' I'm up and on the range early again. This is another day when I can't do anything wrong with a rifle and the devil keeps on a-whisperin' how good I am. I admit it. On my way back to camp that evenin' I'm a-hopin' that the stranger makes his play tonight, just hopin' to hell that he does. When I get there he's gone!

"About a hour ago," says Harrigan, "he saddled up and pulled his freight for no reason, no reason at all."

But *I* know that he did have a reason. A good reason, too. He's afraid—*afraid of me!*

TWO days later another stranger shows up. He's a lean six-footer with black hair a-fallin' to his shoulders like lots of men wear their hair on the buffalo range, and he's got a mustache to match it. His eyes are dark and keen, but they pack a twinkle that you can't help likin'. He rides in before noon while we're all workin' on a new dugout, says his name is Henry Baker and he's pardners in an outfit south and west of us a good piece. His horse is ganted up a-plenty. Seems like he run onto a small band of Pawnees on his way down from Dodge and they taken a shine to his hair, so he had to do some ridin' to keep it. Baker is plumb funny and he's got everybody laughin' before he's been here ten minutes.

Somehow or other I ain't noways afraid of *this* stranger. I've still got that circled wolf feelin', but what with all the devil has whispered to me and the way the other stranger run off from me, I ain't scared of nothin' or nobody and to tell the truth—I'm sorta hopin' this Henry Baker turns out to be a lawman and makes a pass at me. He won't if he knows what I can do with a gun, I betcha. That's the way I'm a-thinkin', salty as all get out.

After dinner we go to talkin' horse and I take Baker out to show him my lanky bay—Frio. We stand there smokin' and admirin' Old Frio's good points and I can see that this man knows horseflesh.

Pretty soon, Baker says, "Yes sir, Slim, you've shore got you plenty horse in that there bay. Now—just looky what I've got in my hands."

No need to look. I've already seen 'em. In his left—a Deputy U. S. Marshal's badge! In his right—a six-shooter! And it ain't twelve inches from where my heart would be if it hadn't jumped clean into my throat. He's got the drop on me, *on me!* Right before my eyes, too, right while I was lookin' him in the face. That's the hell of it. If he'd caught me when my back was turned it wouldn't have hurt half as bad. But right before my eyes! Out-smarted me. Me—a gun-slingin' fool. Yeah-h, a fool. I'm licked, plumb de-salted and my spine is as limber as a bullwhacker's whip. I fold my arms.

"Whoa-up!" snaps Baker. "Untangle 'em! Keep your hands in sight. Don't let a gunsharp hide his hands, kid, 'cause you never can tell what he'll have in his fist when he uncovers his paws."

I put up my hands.

Baker eyes me steady, then says, "I've got a warrant in my saddlebag if you want to see it, Slim, but I reckon you know what we want you for."

I nod my head. Can't talk yet.

The marshal moves back a step out of reach of my long arms. "Unbuckle your belts and drop 'em. Good. Now, lead your horse to camp and saddle up. We gotta ramble. It's a long ways to Fort Smith."

Fort Smith! Fort Smith and Federal Judge Parker, the Hangin' Judge! The circle has closed in. The wolf is caught, but why in hell didn't they shoot him instead of dabbin' a loop onto him to strangle him. And my damned guns got me into this mess, then throwed me down!

IT AIN'T long before we're a-headin' east across the plains, ridin' almost stirrup-to-stirrup. I'm carryin' everything that belongs to me except my weapons. The marshal has tied them to his own saddle. And by the way, his name ain't Henry Baker at all. It's Heck Henderson and he hasn't always been a lawman. He used to ride for some of the big outfits down in my part of Texas, but that was long before I started out. He's about fifteen year older'n me. Maybe that's how come he was able to outsmart me—more experience. Sorta eases my feelin's to think so, anyhow. Henderson don't say a word about what all the law has got against me and he's so daggoned jolly and friendly, damned if I ain't taken a likin' to the cuss before we've gone five miles. I gotta admit that he's a good egg, just doin' the job of work that he gets paid to do—that's all.

We're a-ridin' along easy and there's a low ridge on our right, south of us. The ridge ends in kind of a narrow valley on ahead about a mile or so. I know every inch of this country, but Henderson allows that he ain't never been here before. All of a sudden we hear somethin' south, beyond the ridge, and we both know what it is. At

first it sounds like wind in heavy grass, but it quick turns into a rumble like far-off thunder and it comes closer and grows and grows until it fills the air and makes the earth tremble. It's a buffalo stampede, a big one, and we're smack in the path of it. Our horses know what it is, too. They snort and tongue their bits and fight for their heads.

Henderson takes a look at the ridge, and declares, "That rise is so gentle it won't even slow 'em up. Strikes me, Slim, that we'd ought to get to hell away from here *now*."

I keep still for a minute and in that time I do a heap of powerful fast thinkin'. So he out-smarted me, knows more'n I do about *some* things, but he don't know what I know about the ridge that's between us and the stampede. He don't know that all along its south side there's a cutbank from six to ten foot high, a little precipice that will stop any stampede, so the buffalo will swing east around the point of the ridge and go foggin' up the valley that lays ahead of us. I steal a glance at the marshal's horse. It shore is ganted up. It couldn't stay in the lead of a bull stampede for three hundred yards. But my Frio could. Old Frio could lead those bulls for twenty miles and never wet his saddle-blanket. Well, this ain't no friendly game. It's a hard game and the stakes are high.

I listen to the thunder of the stampede and, I look at the valley out yonder a-measurin' time and distance, then I tell him, "You *could* be right, marshal. We'd ought to be able to make the valley in plenty time."

We lift our horses into a lope. I soon see that his'n can't do much better than that, but it ought to be fast enough to get us well out into the valley by the time the stampedin' buffalo run onto us. And it is. We're nearly halfway across when that herd of crazy bulls swings away from the ridge and its cutbank and roars into the valley like a headrise of water bustin' over a dam. It's too late for us to turn back and we'll never make it across with Henderson's horse. Old Frio is a-rarin' to go. He can run circles around those bulls. I'm a free man now, or just as good as!

I look at the marshal. His jaw is set hard and his cheeks are sunk. The man can ride. He's makin' it as easy on his horse as anybody could and he ain't quirtin' or spurrin' none to speak of. He knows that the poor beast is givin' him all it's got. And I betcha he knows how a man and his horse look after a stampede of two-thousand-pound bulls has rolled over them. Betcha he sees himself thataway now. Then an idea strikes me—hits me hard as hell. I ain't armed. Why don't he shoot me out of my saddle and take my horse? We're still far enough ahead for him to make the switch. *Why don't he?* I would. Or would I?

Swingin' over close, I yell to make him hear me, "Gimme my belts, then you climb on behind me!"

Henderson jerks my gun-belts loose and hands 'em over.

"I'll move ahead a little!" I yell, "Now!"

The man can ride. He makes it easy from horse to horse. As we're pullin' away he jerks a six-shooter and drives a bullet between his horse's eyes.

"Better that way!" he hollers in my ear. "Much obliged, Slim!"

I DON'T say nothin'. I've got things to think about. Old Frio can't stay ahead of the stampede a-carryin' double and he can't go fast enough now to get out of its way on one side or the other. This run of buffalo has too wide a front for that. The marshal must know this. Why don't he shoot me now and dump me off and take my horse? Yeah, why don't he? He's too much man, that's why.

On ahead a ways I see one of those peculiar formations you find in some valleys—a pillar of ground a-stickin' up, soil that's harder than that around it and ain't washed and blowed out as fast. This one ain't more'n eight foot high and six foot thick, but it'll have to do. With two big men aboard, Frio is slowin' down and I don't blame him. But he's doin' his damnedest. His head and neck are stretched in a straight line like he was tryin' to grab distance with his teeth, the whites of his eyes are red and with that infernal stampede a-thunderin' at his hocks I can feel his heart beatin' like a sledge-hammer between my knees. We ain't got much time left now.

So I yell at Henderson, "Get fixed to

jump! We'll unload on that pillar up yonder!"

WE MAKE it in the nick of time. As I'm leavin' the saddle I yank off Frio's bridle and he goes away from there like a horse with wings. A small band of bulls is runnin' ahead of the main herd. They split for our pillar, but two of the big brutes slam into it a glancin' blow and it shakes and it crumbles where they hit. The main herd will level it to the ground sure as hell!

If ever in my life I've wanted to run—a crazy, wild, senseless run—now is the time. As far as I can see into the dust this stampede ain't got no end. The valley is floored with up-curved horns, shaggy and curly heads and humps movin' up and down in a rockin'chair motion, hoofs hard and sharp a-cuttin' everything to shreds and grindin' the earth to powder. I'm a-sweatin' all over and for one miserable moment I ain't got a lick of sense left in me.

Then I look at Marshal Heck Henderson. He's down on one knee and his six-shooter is a-danglin' loose in his fingers, easy and careless. His jaw is set and his hat is a-ridin' low over his eyes and I can see that he's a-figurin' some. Maybe he can outsmart those crazy bulls like he outsmarted me. *Maybe!*

"Slim!" he yells. "Shoot 'em in the knee joints! Bust their knees! Pile 'em up in front of us! That'll split 'em!"

Why the devil didn't I think of that! I know and he knows, of course, that it's the only way we can hope to stop a chargin' buffalo with anything less than a Sharp's. Here's one time when my years and years of practice with a short gun pays off, one time when a gun is my friend. A buffalo is a clumsy beast and his legs don't move like a pronghorn's, but a knee joint ain't none too big a target when it's a-churnin' up and down a-carryin' two thousand pounds of sudden death straight at you. The marshal is so damned cool it's catchin'. Like he does, I wait until the leaders are in my range, then I cut loose as if I was shootin' at my swingin' target at home.

A big bull stumbles, misses one jump, then he's buried. The one first comin' over him lands on a busted knee and goes down. That's Henderson's shot—a damned good one, too. And so it goes. We pile 'em up in front of our stand, but seems like the herd won't never split. Reckon it's only a matter of seconds, but it seems like hours to me.

The crazy brutes climb and plunge over those that are down a-cuttin' 'em all to pieces, and if we hadn't been the marksmen to start droppin' them so far out they'd have piled over *us* by now. At last a big bull with needle-point horns and a mop caked with dried mud and trash until he can hardly see straight ahead, plunges over those that are down and throws himself headfirst into our stand. It shakes and crumbles until I swear it's goin' down. I've picked a carcass to dive under if I can, then the herd splits and the stampede goes a-rumblin' past on both sides of us. Five minutes later it's gone, a-roarin' up the valley.

Marshal Heck Henderson holsters his gun and grins at me. "Good shootin', Slim, you old gunsharp," he drawls lazy. "That's what I call a middlin' close shave—middlin' close and powerful painful."

I'm still too worked up to trust my voice for fear it will be shaky. I start to unbuckle my belts.

"Keep 'em!" snaps the marshal. "You've earned 'em."

THEN he kind of settles onto his heels, folds his arms and looks me up and down good. His eyes come back to my face and I've got a feelin' that it won't never do no good to lie to this jasper about nothin'.

Pretty soon, he asks low and easy, "How long have you been with Harrigan's outfit?"

"Little over a week."

"Where were you and what were you doin' the month before that?"

"None of your damned business, marshal."

Henderson fingers his mustache thoughtful, and I swear his eyes make me squirm. "In the last week have you seen a man as tall as you are?"

"Nope."

That other Slim *ain't* as tall as me, so I didn't lie, but my face must have told this old eagle-eye somethin'.

For he chuckles like he's plumb relieved and happy about it, and says, "You're a liar, Slim! I've been trailin' a man about your size who killed a Deputy U. S. Marshal a month ago and took his badge. I know he was headin' this way and come to think of it, one of your skinners dropped a word about a stranger in your camp a day or so ago. Come along, you! We're a-hoofin' it back there to see if I can find a man who'll tell me the truth."

On our way to the marshal's dead horse, he tells me, "You're a mighty poor liar, Slim, but I'm your friend and don't you ever forget it."

Now I've gone and told you how I tangled with Marshal Heck Henderson ten year ago.

First Chevalier

By S. Omar Barker

WHERE lies his dust nobody knows,
Upon no page his name;
No oldest fading record shows
The item of his fame.

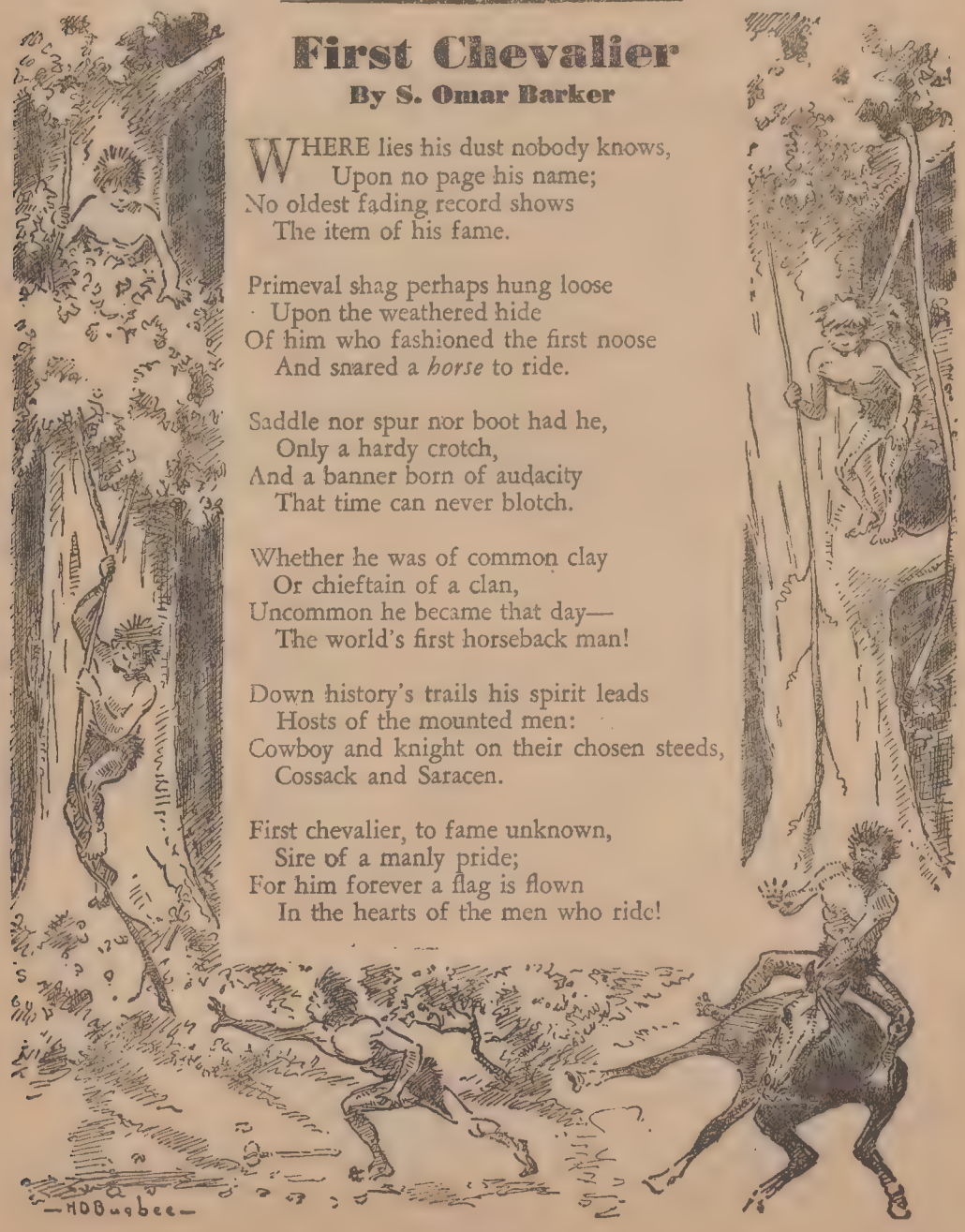
Primeval shag perhaps hung loose
Upon the weathered hide
Of him who fashioned the first noose
And snared a *horse* to ride.

Saddle nor spur nor boot had he,
Only a hardy crotch,
And a banner born of audacity
That time can never blotch.

Whether he was of common clay
Or chieftain of a clan,
Uncommon he became that day—
The world's first horseback man!

Down history's trails his spirit leads
Hosts of the mounted men:
Cowboy and knight on their chosen steeds,
Cossack and Saracen.

First chevalier, to fame unknown,
Sire of a manly pride;
For him forever a flag is flown
In the hearts of the men who ride!



Guess What Freighter Went Harumphing Down the Latitudes With the Devil In Pursuit?

DECISION AT GREAT SANDY

By STEVE HALL

I HAD been shipmates with Christopher Dorney for ten years, off and on, before I learned that he was one of a rare breed, a sailor with a purpose in life. He was waiting for a man to die.

The man was Captain Jorge Oelrich, and having known of the captain by dubious reputation and unsavory legend for far too many years, I thought the idea a good one. That was before I found out that Chris Dorney was going to kill him.

We were on the beach between trips, Chris and I, when the affair came to a head. Like most seamen on a busman's holiday we were swinging our heels over an Embarcadero stringer piece, telling amiable lies and criticizing the docking maneuvers of the various pilots and coastwise skippers as they brought their vessels in for landings. It's enjoyable work, berthing ships—when you can do it from the dock.

At the moment, a big rust-scarred freighter was warping ponderously around the corner of the pierhead a hundred or so yards away.

She was a foreigner by the cut of her house, but the American ensign rippled from her monkey gaff and there was no red and white pilot's Hypo flying at the yard.

Chris ran a long-fingered hand through his carefully trimmed black beard and

squirted tobacco juice to the tide sucking past the pilings beneath us.

"Dutchman," he guessed, "by the rake of her stack. Taken over and converted during the war I suppose. Don't know her. Must be east coast or gulf."

I fished a Shipping Guide out of the hip pocket of my khakis and turned to the day's arrivals. "Anacortes, ex-Batavia," I quoted, confirming his guess. "Out of Baltimore for Brisbane, Australia, by way of Pacific Coast ports." I eyed the plimsoll marks, nearly awash, and the deckload of timbers chain-lashed to her well decks. "Loaded in the Sound," I contributed. "Or Columbia River. In here to top off."

ON THE *Anacortes* a headline snaked out from the fo'c'slehead, was cleated by the linemen on the dock and began to heave tight on the freighter's niggerhead. Suddenly the line surged, slipped and ran free, a huge bight sagging to the water. Murky bay chop showed between ship and dock and the vessel, out of position, swung wide into the ebb. The line parted with an audible ping. A stream of deepwater oaths exploded from the shipmaster on the bridge, condemning the mate and men on the fo'c'slehead.

"Tch, tch," I clucked sympathetically. "Looks like maybe there'll be a chief mate packing his bags when and if they get alongside."

Chris Dorney pulled his big, hard-muscled body to his feet and there was a tight glint to his light eyes that I should have recognized, but didn't.

His voice, unlike the cloudy agate under his lids, was quiet, carefully controlled. "Oelrich," he said, "Jorge Oelrich. I'd remember that voice. Even across a hundred yards of water. Or miles. Captain Jorge Oelrich." The last faded off to almost a whisper.

"Brandon," I corrected him, reading from the Guide. "Wrong guess, Chris."

He shook his head slowly, stubbornly. "Oelrich," he said again, ". . . or I'm a ribbon clerk."

"Both're possible," I grinned. Then I saw the fists at his sides squeezed to yellow-knuckled tightness. I stopped grinning.

He hadn't even heard my wisecrack. "Sig," he went on thoughtfully, "I'm tired of these coastwise pots. How about a blue-water trip for a change? Australia, say? There was a wench I knew, at Plasto's, down Sydney way, who I could stand seeing again."

"Uh-uh," I protested, beginning to catch on. "I got a wife in Sioux Falls. And a dog. Me, I'm going home this trip. You can come along—and play with the dog."

For an instant quick humor softened the lines around his mouth. "Hell man, you were home a year ago!" he said, and then his lips pressed pale again, his voice wandering off. "Oelrich. We—we've a spot of unfinished business, he and I."

I remembered then, piecing together a score of forgotten scraps of conversation that had passed unnoticed over as many beers in waterfront cafes up and down the coast.

I remembered, for instance, that Christopher Dorney was a shipowner's son and that he had once had something beside tattoos and an unreasonable dislike for the sea.

I must have remembered subconsciously, also, that there was a reason for his beard. Modern sailors don't go in for facial adornment, except perhaps the U. S. O. commandos making their first deepwater trips. And Christopher Dorney was no prairie schooner sailor.

I remembered, too, that his father . . . and there I had it. It came back to me now. Lost at sea when the *Idalia,* owned as well as skippered by the elder Dorney, had foundered in the fog-bound Aleutians a dozen years before. There had been no insurance, Captain Dorney's philosophy being that insurance ate up the percentages and he was running his vessel for profit. If he lost the *Idalia,* well . . .

HE'D lost it all right, leaving young Chris, a deck boy with him at the time, to start all over again. And that was all right, too, aside from the fact of Chris' grief. But . . .

Another night, another beer, another hint dropped, another name mentioned. Jorge Oelrich.

I thought I was beginning to understand why young Chris Dorney was a man with a mission in life, a man who was waiting.

"Oelrich," I said. "If that is Oelrich. . . ."

I made the last a question. "Wasn't he aboard when the—the *Idalia* went down.

Chris said, "Mate under my old man." His voice went on, toneless, even, explaining. "I looked him up when we got back to the Sound. He was on Alaska Steam's payroll as well as the *Idalia's*. Alaska Steam was our biggest competitor. A corporation, run with stockholder's money. They had to carry insurance. Lots of it. So much that they couldn't meet our rates."

He paused a minute to shift the tobacco to his other cheek, then went on softly, "That's about the time Oelrich shipped aboard."

The ball of his thumb rolled suggestively across the tips of his upturned fingers. "That's Jorge Oelrich," he said. "A professional wrecker. You'll find a few of them along the coast. He disappeared after that. Fast. And then the war. I lost track of him."

Chris's heavy shoulders lifted an inch or two, but his eyes were steadied on the freighter's bridge.

"Australia, Sig?" he asked after a while.

I sighed. "Last letter I had from home," I said, "was addressed, Dear Sir. But . . ."

WE CAME aboard together, the *Anacortes'* new first and second mates. I had been right about the original chief officer. He had come down the plank within an hour after docking with a scowl on his face and his bags in his hand. The second mate? Well, Christopher Dorney is persuasive. And the night was dark.

"Dorney, the mate you ordered," Chris introduced himself. "This is Mr. Horner, the second officer."

Captain Oelrich, alias Brandon, looked us over and didn't appear to like what met his bulging eyes. "Well," he sniffed, "We sail tomorrow so I guess you'll have to do. Get your gear to your rooms. There's work to be done. The deck gang is chipping the boat deck aft."

Chris Dorney's brows were lifted arcs.

"Did I hear you right, sir? Mates don't work with the seamen any more. They haven't for a dozen years. Remember?"

Oelrich's neck swelled like a ripened gourd. "They do on the *Anacortes*, mister. I'll expect you to set the pace."

Chris shook his head. "No," he said.

The captain's face already red, purpled and he took a deliberate forward step.

Chris grinned a tight, small smile. His hands came up a foot or so and his thumbs hooked lazily into his belt.

Oelrich stopped, lips straightened, then turned away. The worsted wrinkled across his fleshy back as he pushed his way into the chartroom.

"Nice character," I said to Chris. "Doesn't even ask how is your Aunt Emma. Get to work, he says."

Chris chomped at a corner of his Stag Plug, then savored the cud thoughtfully. "Think he remembers me, Sig?" he asked.

"Uh-uh," I shook my head, no. "You've grown a lot. And changed. That brush, for instance. Why, even your mother. . . . And then a dozen years is too long to remember a name."

Chris worked the tobacco into one hair-grown cheek. "Not for me it isn't," he said.

"Listen," I said, serious. "You're not going to give this guy the deep six? They throw the key away for that. Federal pokeys aren't nice. They're even worse than going to sea—I've heard."

His head wagged sideways. "I'm not that crazy, Sig. And I've waited too long." He hooked a brawny arm over the railing beside him. "I know Jorge Oelrich.

"He's not sailing for master's wages. There's something else. Insurance maybe. I looked it up this morning and the *Anna's* covered to her foremast truck. We'll just go along for the ride, but . . ."

His eyes, only points of light between his beard and brows, were fastened on the closed door to the chartroom. He rubbed again at his shirtfront. "But, he repeated, "there'll only be one of us homeward bound."

WE HADN'T been at sea a week before I was wondering if any of us were going to make the stateside trip. I was in my room thumbing through an album, refreshing my memories of Sioux Falls and my wife and my dog when an insistent knock sounded at Chris Dorney's room next to mine. It was too early for the A.B. to be calling the watch. I poked my nose through the hooked open crack of the door. The carpenter, sounding line dripping at his feet, was stuttering at Dorney.

"F-four feet of water in number five hold, sir," he said, "I—I . . ."

Chris' number tens landed together on the deck. "That's three and a half feet too much, Chips," he said. I imagined the grin. "I'll have a look. Call the Old Man. Break out the bos'n and the watch on deck. I'll be down in the hold."

My slippers were close on Chris' ears as I squeezed down through the crawl hole into lower five. The sounds rumbling through the steel compartment were enough, and the mate's grin was gone even before his flashlight searched out the lengths of railroad iron that were pounding end on into the *Anna's* shell plating.

Footsteps scraped on the rungs of the access ladder leading down from the 'tween-decks. Captain Oelrich grunted as he saw the sea squirting in through the started rivets.

"Nice bit of stowage," Chris Dorney said, meaning it wasn't a nice bit of stowage.

"That stevedore snapper in Puget Sound," the captain mused aloud, then swung around on the bos'n standing in the darkness behind him. "You, Bos'n. You were to shore this iron if I remember right."

It was good, the accusation. The tone of voice was just right, but the rest of the act missed fire. I got the look in Oelrich's eyes and glanced quickly at Dorney. He'd gotten it, too, and his beard quivered over flexed jaw muscles.

"Y-yessir," the bos'n stammered. "The tomming must have slipped, sir. I—I . . ."

Chris interrupted. "Never mind," he said curtly. "Get it stowed and shored up properly. All hands if necessary. We'll start the pumps and hope they'll hold their own."

I followed the skipper and Chris Dorney up the ladder. Nobody said anything. Two of us, and I was almost certain, three, knew there had never been any shoring in the way of that pounding iron.

THE *Anacortes*, her big Diesels harumphing down the latitudes, outran the courses of the Northeast Trades, shouldered aside the oily, long-running swells of the tropic parallels and pushed finally into the refreshing Southeasterlys of the southern hemisphere.

The pumps were doing well enough with the leak in number five and officers and crew alike had shaken down into the lulled boredom that accompanies an overlong offshore voyage.

Maybe that's why the incident occurred when it did instead of a week later when all hands would be alerted for a landfall and sleepless with channel fever. It was about seven bells in the midwatch. I was half dozing on the pilot stool in the corner of the wheelhouse trying to stay awake and at the same time to keep from falling from my perch in the crotchety motion the *Anna* was making in the beam sea.

I had just hunched my shoulder-blades over the window coaming for a last half-hour of pleasant reverie when a thundering crash went up from the after deck.

The ship came awake like a quake-shaken barracks. I leaped for the alleyway leading aft. The well deck was a maelstrom of upended, tossing timbers. The chain lashings that had secured them to the deck hung in slackened, useless bights and the big twelve-by-twelves were rolling and thrashing in the motion of the seaway like swung bludgeons.

I turned back to the bridge, where I should have stayed in the first place, to bring the *Anna* before the sea. Those twelve-bys had to be corraled before a hatch cover let go. As I started up the ladder to the weather alleyway somebody darted from the shelter of the masthouse, running toward the starboard passage. I jumped for the thwartship connecting alleyway—and was late by seconds. The figure had disappeared. But as I passed the master's quarters I thought the curtain was swinging too violently for only the vessel's motion.

The third mate was in the wheelhouse,

tucking in his shirt-tails and a moment later Oelrich stepped through the doorway not even looking sleepy. Or too surprised. He jerked his head aft.

"Get back there with the mate, Mr. Horner," he growled. "See what you can do about securing that mess."

Chris was down on the well in the shelter of the winches by the time I got there this time, along with most of the deck gang busily engaged in topping the gear to restow the timber. He was puzzling over the broken chains.

He looked up as I began breathing on his neck and pointed mutely to the pelican hook that had joined two lengths of chain. I whistled tunelessly. "Tripped," I said, "those hooks. Not broken."

Chris nodded. "Rope yarns cut," he said, biting into a square of tobacco. "Somebody doesn't want this steamboat to reach Australia."

"And me a home-lovin' guy," I said sadly. "Look now . . . Chris!" I yelled the last word. In the dim flickering of the cargo lights on the crosstrees I'd caught a sudden movement in the shadows that was too quick to be a sailor working at a routine task. I leaped at Dorney and we fell together into the winch beds just as something whushed by overhead like a hurled javelin.

I was the first to scramble to my feet. Above us were three or four seamen and the bos'n working with peaveys and bars on the scattered timbers. Nothing else.

But beside us, and buried inches deep in a wooden hatch cover, was a steel pinch bar still quivering with the force of its flung impetus.

Chris tried a grin that lost itself too quickly in his beard. "Think we'll wait 'til daylight to finish this chore," he said, then added softly, "I've a hunch Oelrich remembers me."

My tongue was too far down my throat to answer. I nodded dumbly.

Our progress back to 'midships must have resembled a pair of crabs too long out of water. Even then my spine crawled a little until I'd safely shut the door of my room behind us. I was beginning to wonder who was going to kill who, and when.

Chris stood with his back against the door, his big hands working. I could see it coming.

"Look," I said hastily. "You can't prove anything, and you can't laugh off murder on the high seas to a Federal judge."

"Another day or two," he growled, "and I won't be alive to prove anything. Let's get it over."

I shook my head, hoping it was a soothing motion.

"Something's bound to open up, Chris. Something you can pin on him. Something you can send him away for." Me and Ingrid Bergman. I began to believe it myself.

He growled again, looked at me, rubbed at his shirt front—and sat down. As it happened he didn't have too long to wait.

AFTER the deckload had been restowed and lashed down the *Anna* settled back into the old routine. This time, though, there was no lulled lethargy on the part of her crew. With lurking, unpredictable death walking her decks, tempers were short, sleep light, conversations limited to the actual working of the vessel.

Captain Oelrich, for one, grew increasingly irritable and morose. He took over the flying bridge as his own, confining the mates and crew alike to the lower bridge and wheelhouse. He spent the long watches puttering and fussing about the upper bridge, reverting back to the habits of depression days, officers, painting, chipping, scraping.

And always the circled dots of noon positions on the plotting sheets drew inexorably southward, zigzagging finally into the dodging, twisting passages of the New Hebrides. Navigation became a full-time job and the thought was ever present that if Oelrich was planning to lose the *Anacortes*, this would be the spot.

Nothing developed, however, except the weather. The fierce, blinding squalls typical of the islands grew progressively worse, evolving at last into a hell-roaring Southerly Buster as the *Anna* stood in for the Australian coast.

The morning of the day that should have given us a landfall, came in like all the rest, gray, dirty, with a solid cloud mass of stratus racing overhead and a half gale howling off the land.

I paced the weather wing of the bridge, sextant in my hand and hope in my heart, waiting for a break in the overcast. Noon,

and with it only a deepening of the blanketing clouds.

Oelrich, Chris at his side, came out of the chartroom.

The captain curved an eyebrow at me.

"Nothing, sir," I said, nodding at the grayness overhead. "Haven't had a sight in two days."

"Send your helmsman topside, Mister," he told me. "We'll steer from the flying bridge 'til we make our landfall. The compass there is more reliable."

The three of us following the A.B. up the ladder.

Oelrich stared ahead at the closed-in horizon. "Four miles visibility at best," he grunted. "Figure she's on the track?"

Chris spoke up. "Might be anywhere," he shrugged. "We haven't had a shot at the sun to check our compasses in forty-eight hours."

Oelrich pressed his belly against the windbreak. "There's sand in the air," he said, and I thought there was hidden excitement in his tone. "We're close."

"Close," Chris agreed, "and the pilot chart shows an onshore set along this coast. We'll be north if anything."

"I disagree," the captain said sharply. "We're south, well south, according to my figures."

Chris lifted his shoulders and eyebrows. "Well, sir . . ." he started in.

THE *Anna* took one then, broad on the fo'c'slehead, and went over like a poled pig. Chris, both hands free, grabbed at the compass binnacle for support.

The vessel rolled her lee bulwarks under, shook herself free of the cascading water, and came back. Chris still hung on, staring at his hands, a puzzled frown creasing his forehead.

"Cap . . ." he said suddenly and stopped. He shot a look at me that might have meant anything, but probably meant decision. I'd seen Chris Dorney spoiling for trouble before.

I laid my sextant in a safe corner.

Chris started toward the master of the *Anacortes,* shuffling flat-footed like a bear, and as purposeful. Just then Oelrich, eyes staring ahead, uttered the one word that would stop all argument.

"Land," he said.

It was there all right, almost dead ahead, a thin brown streak of shoreline, low, dim, unidentifiable.

Chris, with whatever had been on his mind forgotten, raised his 7/50s to his eyes and swung the glasses in a slow arc along the land. The deliberate motion stopped once, continued, and then his head swung back.

All of us saw it then as the *Anna* arose high on a swell, a blotch of white, tall and fingerlike, blending into the murk above the dunes.

"Great Sandy Light," Chris said. "We're north thirty miles. We'd better haul, sir. Fast."

Oelrich, elbows braced, binoculars to his eyes, said scornfully, "That's Moreton Island, Mr. Dorney. We're well to the southard. We'll hold her as she goes."

I started to speak, thought better of it, and waited for Chris.

"If that should be Great Sandy," he said in a voice as cold as a reefer-room mackerel, "if that's Great Sandy there's shoal water three miles offshore. In that case . . ."

"Nonsense, Mister," Oelrich scoffed, and the *Anacortes* struck.

She lurched drunkenly to starboard and by the head. The Diesels vibrated madly, shaking the vessel like an albacore breaking water, as her screws churned air. They died then, abruptly, as the engineer on the platform throttled the fuel and for a long, breathless moment the only sound was the grating of tortured steel on rock from somewhere forward.

The *Anna* lifted on a swell, lazily, as if her life didn't depend on clawing her way off that impaling reef. Lifted, rolled with the sea, and came free. She was quiet then, rolling gently in the lee of the rocks, but lower in the bows and listing heavily to port. Belatedly, a pot clanged to the deck in the galley, sounding like the knell of doom in the sudden silence.

"Well, you've done it," Chris said finally. "You've beached the *Anacortes.* You've been a long time trying."

OELRICH ignored the accusation, his face spume white. "We'll abandon, Mister," he said hoarsely, "while there's light enough to make a landing in the boats." He started toward the whistle cord.

"Wait!" Chris said and shoved at the captain's shoulder. "The *Anna's* not done. She'll float. For awhile at least. Till we settle a couple of things."

"You!" Oelrich sneered. "Who asked you?" He jerked his chins at the forward well, already awash. "She's finished I tell you. We'll abandon. That's an order."

Chris shook his head. "No," he said, "we won't abandon. You've forgotten something. You've forgotten that a ship with a deckload of lumber won't sink. It's just like pontoons fore and aft. She'll float 'til we get her to a drydock."

His voice grew soft, confiding. "I think you know that, too. You haven't forgotten. That's why you tried to dump the timber a few days back."

Oelrich's face was as dark as distant fog. "You know a lot, Mister!"

Chris nodded amiably. "I know your right name—Oelrich. The Steamboat Inspectors will be interested in that when we get back. If you get back. And I know why you've tried to wreck this vessel. It's your business. Just like it was your business to beach the *Idalia* ten years ago. Wrecking, for a price."

Dull red rimmed the captain's eyes and his hand reached casually toward his peacoat pocket. Chris Dorney's hand, a fist, wasn't casual. It caught the other below the ear and Oelrich went over backward, clutching wildly at the canvas windbreak. The .38, half out of his pocket, spun down the cant of the deck.

"That's one for the *Idalia,* and my old man," Chris said and sent a contemptuous stream of tobacco juice after the gun. "The last resort," he continued, "like on the *Idalia.* Remember, Oelrich?" He loosened the top buttons on his shirt, revealing a lemon-sized hollow in his collar-bone.

"Dorney!" Oelrich spat out, and his bluff was gone. "Young Dorney."

"The same," Chris agreed. "Left for dead when the crew abandoned—on your orders. Only I didn't die. I've lived to see you hang for the murder of my father. Or to break rock at Atlanta for this little job if I can't make the murder charge stick."

Blotched color came back to Oelrich's cheeks. He sat up. "Prove it," he sneered. "This or the *Idalia.*"

CHRIS chewed a moment, silently. "The *Idalia* was pretty cute," he said, "and I was pretty young. But I was old enough to know that the old man didn't stick with the ship. That went out with the skys'l yarders. But let it go."

He scratched mechanically at his beard then went on: "This one's clever, too, but I've got you right this time." He turned to me. "Run your hand across the compass binnacle, Sig."

I did. One side was smooth, the other rough.

"Feel anything?"

"Sand," I said, "in the paint, or . . ."

"Iron filings," Chris finished for me. "Plenty, I'd say, to give the compass enough easterly error to set us north thirty miles or so in two day's run. Witnesses, too. Half a dozen of us saw him do that paint job. He . . ."

Oelrich was on us then in a blind, rushing fury, lips drawn back, both arms flailing as he charged down the slope of the deck. I made a wild grab for his milling arms, but missed as somewhere down below the *Anna's* cargo shifted and the bridge deck buckled and fell out from under me. Even as I went down I saw Chris swing once—and miss.

Oelrich, unable to check his lunge under the impetus of the *Anna's* careening deck, went by like a maddening bull. He stumbled, legs sprawling, clawed air frantically, and plunged head-on into the steel stanchions of the bridge wing with a sickening crunch. He lay still, a relaxed, crumpled mass of flesh with his head at an inhuman angle.

Chris looked at him soberly. "Broken neck," he said impassionately. "That's one for the *Anna,* and for me."

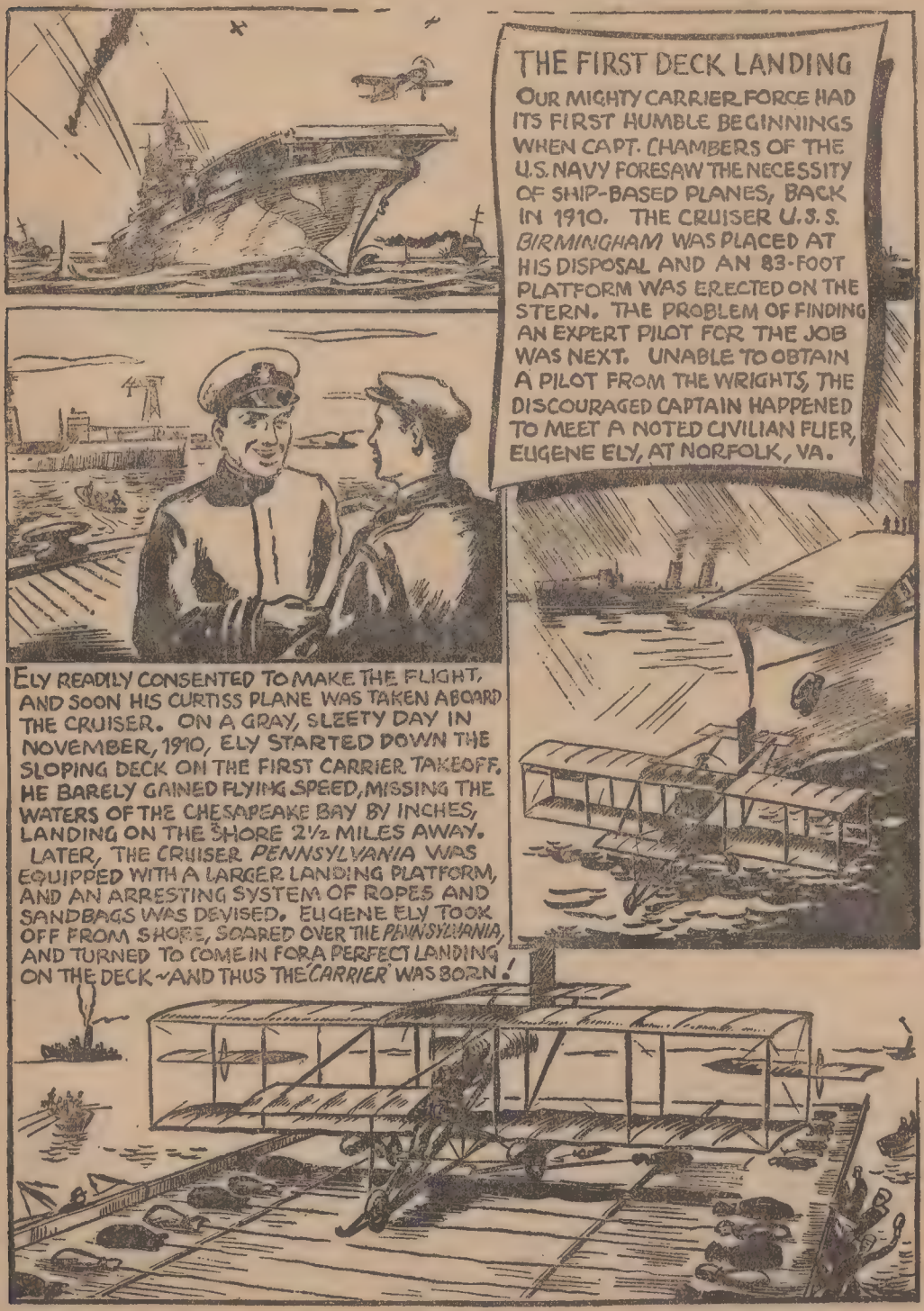
He searched his pockets for tobacco. "Get for'ard, Sig, and drop an anchor. I'll radio for tugs. She'll lay here, the *Anna* will, 'til they arrive."

He whittled shavings from the plug of tobacco thoughtfully. "Those towboat guys get around," he said after a while. "They might know about that Plasto's wench."

I thought about Sydney, and the Plasto's wench. I remembered sadly that the last time I'd been home my own dog chased me down the street.

FLYING TINTYPES

BY JIM RAY


THE FIRST DECK LANDING
OUR MIGHTY CARRIER FORCE HAD ITS FIRST HUMBLE BEGINNINGS WHEN CAPT. CHAMBERS OF THE U.S. NAVY FORESAW THE NECESSITY OF SHIP-BASED PLANES, BACK IN 1910. THE CRUISER U.S.S. BIRMINGHAM WAS PLACED AT HIS DISPOSAL AND AN 83-FOOT PLATFORM WAS ERECTED ON THE STERN. THE PROBLEM OF FINDING AN EXPERT PILOT FOR THE JOB WAS NEXT. UNABLE TO OBTAIN A PILOT FROM THE WRIGHTS, THE DISCOURAGED CAPTAIN HAPPENED TO MEET A NOTED CIVILIAN FLIER, EUGENE ELY, AT NORFOLK, VA.
ELY READILY CONSENTED TO MAKE THE FLIGHT, AND SOON HIS CURTISS PLANE WAS TAKEN ABOARD THE CRUISER. ON A GRAY, SLEETY DAY IN NOVEMBER, 1910, ELY STARTED DOWN THE SLOPING DECK ON THE FIRST CARRIER TAKEOFF. HE BARELY GAINED FLYING SPEED, MISSING THE WATERS OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY BY INCHES, LANDING ON THE SHORE 2½ MILES AWAY.
LATER, THE CRUISER PENNSYLVANIA WAS EQUIPPED WITH A LARGER LANDING PLATFORM, AND AN ARRESTING SYSTEM OF ROPES AND SANDBAGS WAS DEVISED. EUGENE ELY TOOK OFF FROM SHORE, SOARED OVER THE PENNSYLVANIA, AND TURNED TO COME IN FOR A PERFECT LANDING ON THE DECK—AND THUS THE 'CARRIER' WAS BORN!

High Country

By PETER DAWSON

Part II

THE STORY SO FAR

JIM SHERILL had lost a band of horses, and because he was so mad about it, he started off alone to get them back. The law would have helped, but Jim just wouldn't wait for the law. He wanted to make his own way into outlaw country, though his partner, Ted Rawn, thought he was crazy to go it alone though he has the support of a "wolfer," Jake Henry. Moreover, George Lovelace, whose daughter, Ruth, was engaged to Jim, thought he should settle down at Hannibal and not go chasing horses all over the West; in fact said he'd have to or he couldn't have Ruth. Ruth thinks differently.

Then Jim gets involved with another girl; Jean Ruick accuses him of horse stealing and before he gets that straightened out he visits Jean's home. It's the Anchor ranch, owned by Jean, but managed by her uncle, "Major" Donovan. Incidentally Jean doesn't trust her uncle, but Jim doesn't know that till later. Once he's cleared himself with Jean, he arranges to lease part of the Anchor range for his horses, then starts once more in pursuit of them into a hideout corral. He is holding

Some Very Pretty Double-Crossing Was Taking Place in the High Country

his sorrel to a fast trot when a voice says sharply:

"Not so fast."

III

MITCH LOCKWOOD saw Sherill's head come around, saw him weigh his chances and at once discard them; all this in an instant.

A vast relief flowed through Mitch. Since sighting Sherill on that high rim twenty minutes ago, he had known that he wasn't going to use the Winchester on the stranger as certainly as he had known that this carefully planned interception would bring them together.

Now his thought was, *Ed won't take this from me.* He lifted the carbine's barrel a trifle in a gesture Sherill immediately understood. He leaned there, elbows on the top of the outcrop, the Winchester still held ready, and watched Sherill carefully pull his jumper aside and lift out the Colt and toss it to the ground.

He straightened then and stepped back to gather up the reins of his ground-haltered roan. He led the horse on down through the trees and picked up Sherill's gun. Giving Sherill a steady glance, he drawled:

"Some people never learn. You must be one of 'em."

Sherill's slow grin came then and Mitch's thought was, *Does anything bother him?* as Sherill asked, "Why didn't you let me have it?"

"Because I got you into this," Mitch said angrily. "Because I think Ed made a wrong guess. And maybe because I think you need lookin' after."

"I get along all right," Sherill drawled.

Mitch ignored the remark, tilting his head. "The trail's off there over that hill. Hit it and follow it out. Clear out. And don't come back. The bunch is workin' that country west of here today. You won't be stopped."

"I've already been out."

Mitch noticed Sherill's wide hat now, drawling, "So I see. Well, you're goin' again. For good."

"Not before I've seen Ed."

Strong surprise momentarily widened Mitch's eyes. He saw where he had been wrong about something. "So you weren't lost after all," he said. He caught Sherill's shake of the head and asked impatiently, "Why see Ed?"

"We might help each other along."

Mitch smiled coldly. "Ed Stedman ever help anyone?"

"He'll listen to me."

"Look," Mitch said with a thin patience, "Ed's ribs may be caved in from the lamp you tossed at him. He's not sure yet. And Slim's got a hole through his leg and a busted face you gave him."

"Ed'll still listen."

Mitch gave Sherill a long and completely baffled inspection. Finally he sighed wearily and, turning away, said, "I can think of fancier ways of dyin'. But we all got our own ideas." He thrust the carbine in its scabbard and climbed up into leather.

"So you'll take me in?"

"Can I keep you out?" Mitch asked angrily. "You know the way now."

Sherill held out a hand. "Then how about my iron?"

"Now I know you're loco. Hunh-uh! I like to know how I stand around a wild man." Mitch nodded toward the higher trees. "You first."

Sherill led the way on up through the pines and around the tangles of scrub-oak and presently, over that low rise, they came to the trail that footed the canyon's east wall.

There was no stir of air and the heat was trapped in this narrow corridor and as they turned up along the trail Sherill shrugged out of his jumper and laid it across his thighs behind the horn of the saddle.

Farther on, where the canyon broadened and the trail lifted obliquely across open ground, he drew in on the sorrel and let Mitch come up on him, drawling, "So Ed's not feeling too good?"

Mitch came abreast, to Sherill's right and not close. "So sore he can't stand straight."

SHERILL laughed softly. "It's a good thing the lamp went out." He idly rested his free hand on his thigh, on the jumper.

"We thought of that, too," was Mitch's dry comment.

Sherill's right arm arched out suddenly, swinging the jumper by the neckband as he kneed the sorrel in at Mitch. The bottom of the jumper caught Mitch across the face an instant after he saw what was coming. He dropped his hand to his gun.

Sherill rolled out of the saddle and dove at him, catching his lifting right arm as their animals shied apart. Sherill's weight dragged Mitch off balance and they both fell, Mitch underneath when they hit the ground. A moment later the Colt spun from his hand.

Mitch was quick and tough, cunning at this rough and tumble sort of a fight. Before Sherill knew it, he had squirmed from under him and they were simultaneously coming to their feet.

Mitch hit Sherill above the heart in a vicious quick punch. But he didn't follow through and was too slow lifting his guard and Sherill threw a fast jab with a lot of weight behind that raked him across the mouth. He tried to close on Sherill and couldn't. He knew then that he was fighting a faster man.

He was a little groggy and the salty taste of blood was in his mouth. He kept doggedly lunging in and not finding Sherill, seeing him plainly enough but somehow not hitting him. He took two more solid blows in the face and then some more and the last ones he didn't feel at all. He didn't know he was down until his sight cleared and he

found himself lying on his back looking up at Sherill's tall shape.

Sherill wore Mitch's belt and holster now. The handle of his own Colt stuck out above the belt of his waist-overalls. He looked down at Mitch and gravely asked, "Why didn't you quit?"

Mitch tried to hate him and couldn't, his instinct of liking the man too strong to be crowded out. But he did hate being licked this way after landing only one solid punch. So now, without answering, he rolled over and pushed up onto his knees, thinking as slowly as he moved, *This finishes me with Ed.* He stayed on his knees for several seconds, head hung and waiting for the ground to stop spinning beneath him. He felt blood dripping from his chin and didn't care.

He got to his feet finally. He lunged in at Sherill with what he thought was quickness.

Sherill lazily sidestepped him, then caught him as he was falling. Sherill pinned his arms before he could swing, drawling, "Quit, will you!" and Mitch swung a boot back and raked Sherill across the shin with the blunt star-rowel of a spur.

Mitch felt Sherill's hold suddenly tighten and the sky tilted at a crazy angle and then he was being thrown to the ground hard. His head snapped back and struck something solid. For a split-second he was fighting to keep his senses.

That second interval of total blankness was much longer than the first and Mitch came out of it gradually this time, at first aware only of his head wanting to split open with its aching and of his head swaying so that he couldn't control it. Then over his torment he vaguely recognized the feel of the saddle under him and knew that he was on a horse and that the horse was moving.

Finally he dared to open his eyes and it was hard to see through the pinkish haze and pick up blurred images coming toward him and then sliding past. He felt a tightness in his arms and tried to lift them and couldn't. The motion of the horse stopped suddenly and he could indistinctly hear voices over the singing in his head. He looked down and for the first time really understood what he was seeing.

His shell-belt was around his waist, pinning his arms to his sides at the elbows. He lifted his eyes and even in this semi-conscious condition could hardly believe what he saw.

There was Ed's small cabin and the bunkhouse and the high bulk of the sideless barn in the backgrounds through the pines. *An hour,* he thought, *I've been out for an hour, anyway.*

Then alongside him Sherill was saying, "Would I have brought him on in if I didn't want to be here?"

Mitch moved his head around and saw Sherill beside him, holding him erect by a grip on one arm. Then, beyond Sherill, he saw Ed Stedman standing a few feet away holding the Greener, the shotgun's twin bores tilted up at Sherill. His carbine and the two Colts, his and Sherill's, lay there in the dust near Ed.

He mumbled, "Couldn't help it, Ed," but the words didn't seem to make sense and if Ed heard he gave no sign of it.

Ed said now, "Let go of him and get down. Slow."

"He'll fall," Sherill told him.

"Let him fall," Ed said.

Sherill let go of his arm and as a matter of price, to spite Ed, Mitch managed to hold himself upright in the saddle.

He watched Ed motion with the shotgun, watched Sherill step on past Ed. And then the two of them were heading up to the cabin.

Wearily, Mitch lifted his hands and worked the buckle of the belt around to his front and finally loosened it. He was oddly worried about Sherill, more worried about him than about himself. But there was nothing he could do now to help the man.

He let his weight go forward against the horn, took a tight grip on it and slid to the ground. He kept holding onto the horn, mumbling, "Whoa, fella, whoa!" to the horse until he was sure his legs would take his weight.

Finally he pushed away from the roan and stumbled across to the bunkhouse. It took a lot of his strength to step up and through the door. He looked dazedly across the long room with its double row of bunks, the stove at the center and the table at this near end.

He saw Slim lying asleep in the bunk under the window, the leg of his overalls rolled to the knee showing his bandaged

calf. He walked over there and stood looking down at Slim's bruised face, swaying a little.

There was something he wanted to tell Slim. But he couldn't make his voice work. So instead he told himself what he had on his mind. *He's tough. As tough as they come. So don't feel so damned sorry for yourself.*

He walked over to his own bunk then and let his weight collapse onto it. He closed his eyes, feeling a deep peace settle through him, no longer thinking of Sherill or of anything except to wonder how long he'd be out this time.

Across in the small cabin, the shotgun lay across the desk pointing at Sherill. Ed Stedman's hand rested idly beside it. Sherill wasn't much given to talk but he was talking now, trying to beat back the cold reserve that kept Ed's face and pale eyes a blank.

"If I'm a Canadian, why don't I talk like one?" he asked. "No, I was in trouble up there and had to get out. I took the first horse I saw, then swapped him for your blue."

Ed said nothing but kept staring at him in that enigmatic way, sitting hunched over a little from his sore chest. Sherill was beginning to think he couldn't make his story stick, that he'd have to get out of here. The door was behind him, open, maybe two strides away. *Too far,* he decided, and knew that he had no choice now but to keep on talking, playing for a break.

He said patiently, "I had that forty-four of Lockwood's just now. If it was you I was after, I'd have tied Lockwood onto his hull and sent that horse on in ahead of me. Then I could've picked you off when you came out to look at him."

"What are you after?" Ed asked, speaking for the first time in all these minutes.

"I want to make a deal with you," Sherill said.

A meager smile touched Ed's gaunt face. "I make the deals. If there are any. If."

Sherill asked bluntly, "How often do you work this many horses through here?"

"Who said they were goin' through?"

"All right, I'll put it another way. If," and Sherill emphasized that word, "you had a crew that thought the way you did, and *if* you wanted to pick up horses on the quiet, work their brands and sell 'em, you've got the right kind of a layout."

"Somebody said that once," Ed drawled.

Sherill played the game, soberly saying, "Last night down in Whitewater I got to thinking about it and—"

"Whitewater?" Ed cut in, showing the faintest trace of surprise.

"I told you the other night I was going there. I did. I know a man there."

"Who?"

"Man by the name of Rawn. Ned Rawn."

"The remount buyer?"

"Yes. We can use him in this."

"In what?" Ed's tone was still neutral.

"In swapping these horses," Sherill told him.

Ed asked, tonelessly, "Who said we were swappin' any horses?"

Sherill saw that he had to do something to break down the man's suspicion. He acted instinctively then, shrugging and saying, "All right, I can always go to someone else."

"You can if I let you," Ed said smoothly, his lips hardly moving. "Go on with what you started to say."

"Down in Whitewater I asked a few questions. No one seemed to know about many jugheads disappearin' from that country down there. Why is it, I asked myself. This is the sweetest layout I ever came across. Hard to find. Set so you could work horses in from both ends. From as far south as Wyoming and as far north as Canada. You could work the brands, then get rid of your Wyoming horses up north and the Canadian ones in the south."

"We don't fool much with Canadian horses," Ed said.

Now he's opening up was Sherill's thought as he went on, "Then you're missing a good bet. Another thing. Rawn knows me well enough so he'd work in any stuff we had that was good enough for the Army. Geldings, all solid colors, fifteen to sixteen hands. He'd pay eighty apiece."

Ed reached over now and deliberately moved the Greener aside. He leaned forward and picked up a sack of tobacco.

As he built his smoke, he said, "I could always get along with a man that had something between the ears. Help yourself to a chair."

JAKE HENRY had stirred several times that morning and had kept his eyes closed against the pulsing throb of his head,

each time dropping off to sleep again. But by eleven the heat of the loft was close to unbearable and he was feeling a little better. At last he sat up, for a time holding his head in his hands.

Finally, he noticed his torn sleeve and took off the jacket. He repaired the tear with several strips of the sleeve's leather fringe, all the while thinking back on the fight last night and remembering enough of it to know that they would probably be looking for him today. Getting his mule out of Kramer's corral would be no cinch.

HE ALSO remembered what Sherill had told him last night and was more than a little worried about Sherill's predicament. Now he made his guess on where Sherill must have gone today and the urgency to get back up into the hills was all at once strong in him.

He had taken chances all his life and he took one now, believing in his luck. He climbed brazenly down out of the loft and was out of the barn and climbing through the poles of the corral before the hostler became curious enough to come to the feed-room door to see who had walked through the barn. By that time Jake was out of sight along the alley.

He reached Kramer's by a devious back-street route and entered the corral at the back. No one was around and he caught his mule and, with a halter on her, led her over to the leanto behind the barn. Just then a roundabout who was cleaning out the stalls saw him lugging his saddle from the leanto. The youngster laid his pitchfork aside and, glancing back over his shoulder, was on the way up to tell the others when Jake called to him:

"Bub, get back here and give me a hand."

The boy's awe of Jake decided the matter of whether he should run or do as he was told. Reluctantly, he came out of the barn and, staring at Jake wide-eyed, helped saddle the mule.

Jake paid him and asked him to open the back gate. For a few seconds it looked as though the youngster was going to panic and make a run for it, seeing Jake getting away so easily. But he was afraid of the wolfer. So he walked on back and opened the gate. Afterwards, as Jake went up the alley, the boy ran shouting across the corral. By the time the word go around, Jake was well out of town and running his mule hard along the steep grade of the bluff road.

Caleb Donovan was leaving the sheriff's office at about the time Jake was making good his getaway. Donovan had learned little more than Jean and Sherill had already told him, except that Fred Spence wasn't liking it much that Sherill hadn't stopped in at the jail this morning before leaving town.

Donovan couldn't locate Ned Rawn and so set about his errands, a call at his lawyer's office, a trip to the feed store and then to the bank. He ate his midday meal early and afterward, with the everpresent quill toothpick in the corner of his mouth, he went along to the post-office and mailed a postcard to Jacobs, in Sands, offering twenty dollars a head for the culls.

He needed a shave and turned in at the barber-shop. The barber was stropping his razor, Donovan lying back with a hot towel on his face, when the man in the next chair said, "They tell me there's a high stake game on in Bill Meadows' back room. Been goin' since yesterday morning."

Donovan filed away this piece of information and later he followed his hunch and went on up the street to Meadows' hardware store.

HE FOUND Ned Rawn at the table in the room behind the office. Rawn's thin face was pale and showing strain. They asked Donovan into the game and he answered that he might be back later. Then he asked to speak to Rawn privately and he and Rawn went on back through the storeroom to the loading platform at the rear.

"Hate to drag you out of there, Rawn," Donovan said in the careful manner he affected with men he didn't know well.

"Forget it," Ned said in his genial way, "just so long as you don't want to borrow money. They've got all mine."

"Stick with it and your luck always changes," Donovan told him continuing, "What I wanted to ask about was Sherill."

"What about him?"

He'd like to lease part of our range."

"Well?"

Donovan fiddled with his teeth a moment, staring obliquely at Ned. "Will I get my money?"

Ned's face tightened a little. "Why wouldn't you?"

"Well, he was riding that stolen mare yesterday."

"He explained that."

"Then so far as you know he's honest?"

"Not only honest, he's the best damned man I've ever known. Any way you look at it. Does that suit you, Major?"

Donovan smiled, hoping he hadn't offended. "It certainly does. Much obliged. By the way, where's he from?"

"Down in my country." Ned took out his watch, looked at it and bluntly said, "I've got to be going."

He turned then without a further word and went back into the store and Donovan stood staring at the empty doorway feeling let-down and disgusted with himself. He'd only started on the questions he really wanted to ask about Sherill. Now he knew he had gone about it the wrong way.

SOME ten minutes later, on his way up the street after his horse, he was still feeling that disgust. This was the reason for his scowl when, on hearing someone behind him call his name, he stopped and turned.

He saw George Lovelace walking up to him and gave a start of surprise. A momentary guarded expression masked his features. Then, in answer to Lovelace's broad smile, his face took on a forced look of geniality.

"Lord, you're the last person I'd expect to run into, Captain," Lovelace said cordially, extending his hand. "It's been all of six or seven years, hasn't it?"

"At least seven," Donovan said as they shook hands. "You're still the same, Commodore. Not a day older."

Lovelace chuckled. "Fightin' this river doesn't give a man time to grow old." His face went sober as he asked, "Located around here, Captain?"

Donovan nodded, "Helping my niece run a ranch."

"That's fine, just fine," Lovelace said. Then he gravely added, "It was unfortunate, your quitting the Army. Most unfortunate. But I suppose now you're glad you're out of it."

"It's the best thing that ever happened to me," Donovan said. He was feeling uncomfortable for the second time in the past quarter-hour and now, remembering how Rawn had left him, he took out his watch and looked at it, saying, "Sorry, Commodore, but I'm already late meeting a man. Where you staying? My next time in, we'll have a drink together."

"We certainly will," Lovelace answered. "You can always find me down at the River House."

They shook hands again and Lovelace was his usual over-cordial self as they parted.

The Major lost no time in leaving town. He took the road in the opposite direction from Sands. If he was disappointed at the outcome of his meeting with Ned Rawn, he was more than disappointed in having come across Lovelace.

ON LEAVING Donovan, Ned Rawn didn't go back to the poker game but headed for the street. *Six thousand,* he said to himself, *and last week it was four.* He was careful to think no further back than that and now his bony face was tight-drawn and pale, a mirror of his dismal ponderings.

Easy money had worked more of a change in Ned than even Jim Sherill had suspected last night. Sherill was well acquainted with his friend's strong instinct for gambling. But he didn't know that Ned's appetite for taking chances with money had increased since that original gamble when Ned had sunk every cent he could lay hands on into horses and brought them up here to fill his first contract with the Army.

It was typical of Ned that he had bought his way into the remount business by bribing an Army vet to overlook the questionable soundness of certain of his horses. It was also typical of his shrewdness that he had never since offered another bribe.

Ned was easy-going and downright likeable and Whitewater thought of him as an amiable and well-to-do bachelor, perhaps a little overfastidious in his dress. Ramsay, the remount officer at Fort Selby, was his good friend because he never hesitated to do the Army a good turn, such as putting them onto good buys in feed. With the town and the Army so solidly behind him, Ned could have saved his money and actually become what they believed him to be, modestly well off. Instead, the ups and downs of cards had kept him either on the verge of going

broke or with so much money that he could dream of amassing a real fortune.

Today that dream was hazy beyond the curtain of his disappointment over these recent losses. He was wondering now which of his friends was good for a loan, knowing he was limited in his borrowing to the tight circle of the poker crowd, all of whom were close-mouthed.

Bill Meadows, he decided, would be good for a thousand. He wouldn't borrow beyond that unless forced to and now, seeing a possible way out of this tight corner, he immediately felt better.

He had slept only four hours last night and he needed food and a drink and there was no hurry about getting back to the game. So he headed downstreet for the River House, his spirits rising to the point where he started whistling in rhythm with his long stride.

He called for whiskey at the bar and was pouring his second drink when George Lovelace looked in from the lobby, spotted him and came across, saying affably, "You've been keeping out of sight, Ned. Let me buy this one."

"My turn, Commodore." Ned nodded to the apron to bring another glass, and when it came he offered Lovelace the bottle.

Lovelace poured and they drank and only after they had set their glasses down did the Commodore ask, "Have you seen Sherill?"

"No. Never expect Jim till you see him."

The Commodore let an expression of deep solemnity come to his face. "You know, Ned, Sherill and I had some pretty strong words last night."

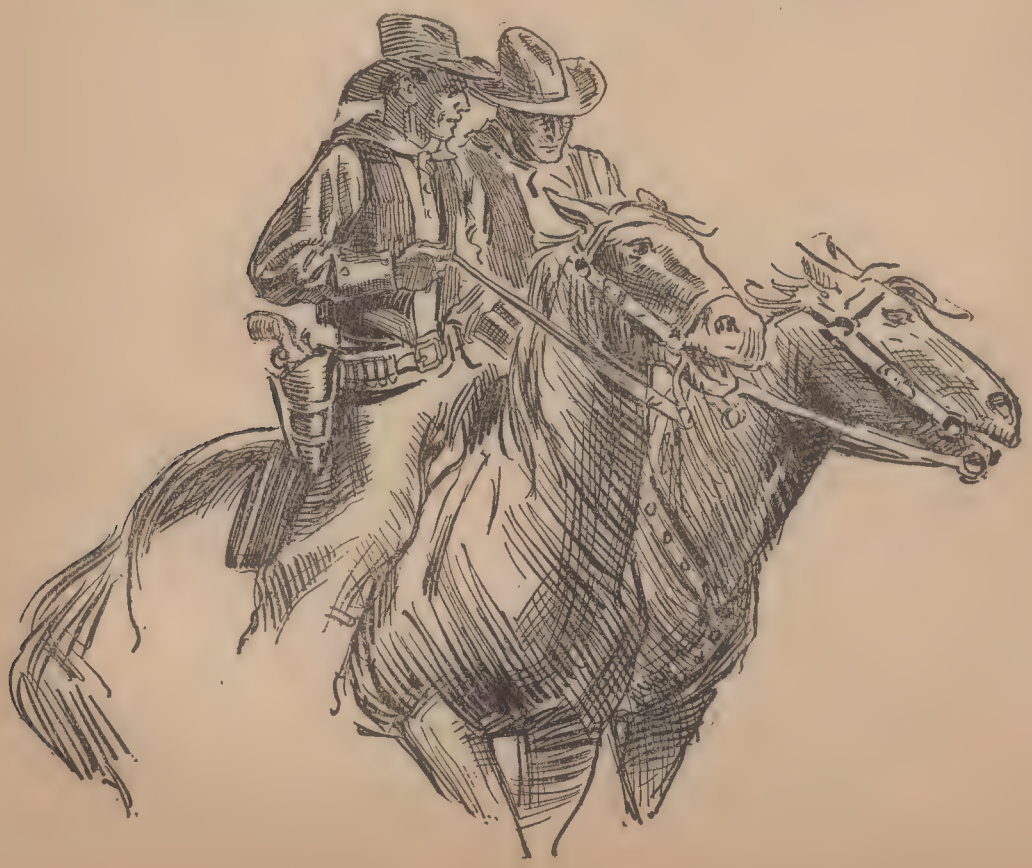
Ned frowned. "What's the matter?"

"It's those horses. He won't call in help and I think he should."

"Don't worry, Commodore. Jim'll make out all right."

"But suppose he doesn't?" Lovelace asked.

"But he will, Commodore. If it'll ease your mind any, he's so sure of it that he's leased range to hold the horses on until time for the next delivery."



"You don't say!"

Ned nodded. "Caleb Donovan, who runs an outfit east of here, told me about it less than fifteen minutes ago."

HE NOTICED the surprise that came to Lovelace's face but couldn't understand it. Lovelace was about to mention knowing Donovan when some instinct in him worked against it. So, to cover his surprise, he insisted, "Suppose all this doesn't work out for Jim?"

"He can stand the loss."

"Maybe he can," Lovelace said. "But what about Ruth? I can't let her marry a poor man. She couldn't stick it with him. Why, Ned, when that girl wants a dress she takes the boat up to St. Louis and comes back with a dozen. She's always got six or eight darkies around to look after her. She even brought one on this trip. Spoiled rotten, she is, and it's my fault. But I spoiled her mother the same way and was never sorry. Gave her everything she ever wanted. Nothing was too good for her."

Ned said deliberately, "You're right, Commodore. A beautiful woman should have everything."

George Lovelace's seriousness didn't melt before this gallantry.

"What's Sherill got to offer her if he loses those horses?" he asked.

"Not much," Ned admitted.

"Now if it was you, I wouldn't spend a minute's thought on it," Lovelace said in an off-hand way. "You've got yours salted away. Sherill hasn't."

Ned was flattered. He covered his slight confusion by saying loyally, "Don't give up hope on Jim, Commodore. He has a way of doing what he sets out to do."

"I know. Damn it, I've told more people what a fine man he is. People down around the plantation. Now, if I bring Ruth home without him, they're going to be asking questions."

"Chances are you'll be taking Jim along."

"Think so?" The Commodore's look brightened considerably. "Well, here's hoping."

They refilled their glasses and drank again and then Lovelace looked up at Ned to say, "I've been thinking of something. There's a lot of people around this town who've been mighty nice to me. Before I go, I want to have them all down to the boat for some real southern cooking."

"Count me in on that, Commodore."

"I certainly will, my boy. Fact is, I'd thought of having the party tomorrow night. The judge is leaving on a trip the day after and I'd like him to be there. How would tomorrow suit you?"

"Fine. You couldn't keep me away."

The Commodore was sober now. "Suppose Jim hasn't shown up by then? Would you look after Ruth? You're her best friend here."

"I'd be honored, Commodore."

"Then let's count on it." The matter was settled. Lovelace offered the bottle to Ned, saying, "This one's mine," and they filled their glasses once more.

They had that drink and talked of several commonplace things and the Commodore finally made his excuses and left. He went straight upstairs, remembering Ned's mention of Caleb Donovan in a calculating way, thinking back on what he knew of the man.

His knock at Ruth's door was answered by Lou, Ruth's colored girl. There was a moment's delay and then Ruth told him to come in.

He found her getting ready for a bath, Lou about to fill a large zinc tub with pails of water she had carried up from the kitchen. Ruth sat before the dresser mirror, wearing nothing but a light cotton wrapper and pinning her pale gold hair high on her head.

"Get on out, Lou," Lovelace said in his lordly way. And, when she had gone, "Daughter, where's your modesty? Cover up your front."

"Don't be cranky, Dad. After all, I wasn't expecting an audience."

Ruth nevertheless adjusted the wrapper so that it no longer exposed the creamy white skin above her small breasts. Then she got up to take her clothes from the room's only other chair.

George Lovelace's glance followed her affectionately and somewhat proudly. The wrapper revealed her figure in a way the fashionable full-skirted dresses never did and he was inclined to agree with Ned Rawn that she was a beautiful woman.

Taking the chair, he said casually, "Saw Ned downstairs just now. He's certainly a fine looking man."

"Has he seen Jim?"

"No," Lovelace cleared his throat, trying to keep the impatience out of his voice. Then, seeing that Ruth was watching him in the mirror as she did her hair, he brightened considerably.

"Ruth, I had an idea and talked it over with Ned," he went on. "How would you like to help me entertain some of my friends on the boat tomorrow night? If Jim isn't back, Ned could take you. In fact, he asked if he could."

Ruth's hands slowly came down and she just as slowly turned to look at him. For long seconds her regard was steady, probing, and gradually her pretty face took on a knowing smile. "So you've thrown Jim over," she said.

"Now look here, Ruth! I—"

Her shake of the head cut him off. "Don't bother explaining. It's all right with me." She stared beyond him wistfully adding, "It'll have to be all right, won't it?"

"Damn it, girl! You're imagining things. Jim may even be here. He—"

"You could wait until you're sure he'll be here."

Lovelace's round face took on a ruddier tinge. "We can't wait forever. I've got obligations to these people. Suppose the river rises and we have to leave?"

"Yes, Dad. Of course."

Over a short silence he asked gruffly, "Anything the matter with Ned Rawn?"

"Nothing. But it would have been nice to dance once more with Jim."

"All right. We'll wait," he said stubbornly.

She shook her head, turning back to the mirror. "No, Dad. We won't wait. Jim had his chance and lost it. Ned's quite a catch and we can't miss this opportunity."

"What the devil are you saying?" he asked indignantly.

"Only what we're both thinking. Ned has money. Quite a lot probably. But does he know that the *Princess* caught fire and burned with her cargo the week after we left? Does he know that you were rained out of a crop of cotton? That you can barely meet your pay roll?"

"God in Heaven, woman!" he shouted. "Why should he?"

"Sh-h-h!" she whispered mockingly. "Lou might hear." She turned a steady eye on him now and, half-smiling, said, "Don't worry, Dad. I'll not give you away. After all, I'm as anxious as you are to—How shall I put it? To make a suitable match?"

BY THREE O'CLOCK that afternoon Jean had finished most of the things that needed doing about the cabin and was standing at the porch door, looking out across the clean-raken yard and the garden with the white picket fence beyond it. She was thinking that this was the most pleasant place she had ever seen. *But lonely, too,* she told herself.

This was the beginning of her second summer here without her father, alone, and lately she had been restless and perhaps less interested in keeping up the house than usual. She often thought of her father and of their short time together, just that one year after her return from the academy in Illinois where she had gone to school and then stayed on to teach two more years. And today she had several times wondered what John Ruick would be doing if he could be in her present situation.

She felt she had dealt with Sherill quite fairly. Her mistake about the mare last evening had been a natural one and this morning she had made a few concessions to try and correct it. Sherill could be watched, although she doubted that he needed watching.

The Major posed an entirely different problem. It was in dealing with him that she would have liked to fall back on her father's sure judgment and iron hand.

Now she forced this unpleasant turn of mind into the background, wondering if she should bake a cake and take it down to Brick for the crew's supper. She went into the kitchen and had opened the flour-bin when her glance happened to go out the window to the rolling horizon and the distant twin ribbons of the road to the north. A boil of dust showed far out there.

A thought struck her sharply and she dropped the sifter back into the bin and went to the door, calling, "Brick!"

She saw him come to the cookhouse door and called, "Will you saddle the claybank?"

She ran to her room then and changed into her gray riding habit. Brick was lead-

ing the claybank up to the porch as she came down the steps.

"Goin' somewhere, youngster?" he asked.

"Just out to get the mail." She let him help her up to the side-saddle, hooking her leg around its projection and then adjusting her skirt.

"Early for the stage, ain't it?" Brick asked.

"No. It just came over the ridge."

She looked down at him, smiling at the curiosity he was taking some pains to hide. She seldom got mail these days and she knew he knew it. So she said mischievously, "Maybe there's a new driver, Brick," and wheeled the claybank away and ran across the yard before he had figured out what she meant.

It was a little over two miles out to the road and she ran the claybank all the way, not wanting to miss the stage. When she reached the junction of trail and road it was lifting over the crest of a hill a quarter-mile away and soon she could hear the rumble of its coming.

THE driver saw her and pulled in on his three teams, a fog of dust overtaking the coach. Two passengers looked out as the high-bodied Concord lurched to a stop beside her, rocking gently on its thoroughbraces, and the old driver called down, "No luck today, Jean."

"Wasn't expecting anything really, Ben," she said, smiling up at him. "But I can always hope."

He laughed, glad for this break in his long run, thinking that John Ruick's daughter got better looking every time he saw her, which wasn't often enough.

"How's the Major?" he asked now, purely out of courtesy.

"Just the same," she told him. Then, "Would you do something for me, Ben?"

"Be glad to."

"I'm out of hairpins," she said quite seriously. "Could you bring me out two packages tomorrow? Those bone ones, not the big size. Brown, if they have them. I'll be waiting here for you."

Ben's weathered face reddened. He lifted a hand and with the back of it uneasily stroked his longhorn mustache, stammering, "Well now—you mean I got to—Heck, I'd like to help you out, Jean, but—"

She could no longer keep a straight face and suddenly burst out laughing. One of the passengers joined in with a loud guffawing and Ben, his face beet-red, tried to say something and couldn't make himself heard.

Finally, with a sheepish grin, he kicked off his brake and swung his whip so that it exploded between the ears of the off-leader. The horses lunged against the traces and the Concord swayed and rolled away.

The stage was dipping out of sight along a downgrade four hundred yards away when Ben turned and waved with his hat. Jean lifted a hand and answered, breathless from her laughing.

Then she remembered her real reason for coming out here and a deep gravity rode over the brightness of her face. She had wanted information from Ben and he had given it to her by inquiring about the Major. Ben's run had today brought him from Sands to Whitewater and now was taking him on to Gap. He had come off the Sands road an hour and a half ago. Had he seen the Major, he would have mentioned it rather than asking about him.

So he didn't go to Sands was her thought as the worry about Donovan came crowding back again.

UP IN the hill cabin, Sherill and Ed Stedman had talked for the better part of half an hour. Ed's manner had changed considerably since that moment when he had reached over to move the shotgun so that it wasn't pointing in Sherill's direction. He had become genial, at times almost enthusiastic over what Sherill had said.

But now Sherill had put the final question, "When do we start?" and the silence hung heavy and unbroken as he waited for Ed's answer.

Outside, the scolding voice of a jay rode the quiet and from the front of the cabin came the muffled stomping of the sorrel and Mitch's roan against the annoyance of the flies.

Ed said finally, "Give me a day or two."

"Why? Because you're still not sure about me?"

In answer, Ed reached down to a drawer

of the desk and lifted out the shell-belt and the holstered horn-handled Colt Sherill had left up here night before last. "Maybe this'll prove something." He pushed the weapon across the desk.

Sherill eyed first the gun and then the man. He shook his head, not reaching for the gun. "How does it? Just because you let me leave here? Hell, if I'd wanted to ride for my health, I could have picked an easier spot to go to."

Ed smiled thinly, nothing more.

"We can't lose on this," Sherill insisted. "All you need is a place up north somewhere below the line. You work the two layouts, this one and the one north, along with that range I've leased. I feed you as much as you can handle, first from Wyoming. I'll bring these horses through fast and from far away so the local tin stars won't bother us. What could go wrong with that?"

"Cool down, man," Ed said with a low laugh. "I'm all for it. It sounds good. But I'd like to think it over."

Talk it over, you mean. The thought struck Sherill suddenly, and now he knew he must have hit on the only answer to Ed's strange reluctance to decide this matter here and now. Ed wasn't able to decide for himself.

Sherill reached for the belt now and stood up and buckled it on. "When do you want me back here?"

"Tomorrow or the day after. Or stay right here. Suit yourself." Ed came up out of his chair, drawling, "Damned if I thought I'd ever get together with you on anything."

"Want to call it off?"

"No. It sounds good."

"But you've got to think it over," Sherill said dryly.

Ed simply shrugged and, knowing nothing more could be done about this, Sherill turned and led the way outside.

As they passed the roan and came up on the sorrel, Ed said, "Mitch has been kinda red-headed about losin' his saddle the other night. Come on. I'll show you where yours is."

Sherill, reaching for the sorrel's reins, thought of something that made him drawl, "If this thing goes through, you've got to keep Lockwood out of my hair."

"I'll have a talk with Mitch."

"I mean that. Either he takes the chip off his shoulder or one of us gets hurt."

"He'll quit fightin' the bit," Ed said. "He knew what he was supposed to do and he wasn't takin' any chances with you."

They walked on past the bunkhouse, Sherill leading the gelding and saying, "He's a wild man. Wouldn't listen to a thing I had to say."

"Good. Now I'll know I can count on him."

THEY changed saddles, Sherill noting that his blanket roll hadn't been touched. He left shortly, heading for the creek and the trail beyond it, and Ed stood watching until he rode out of sight into the lower timber. Then Ed went back to his office, too preoccupied to notice that the roan no longer stood in the yard.

Five minutes ago Mitch had wakened to the sound of voices close to the bunkhouse, instantly recognizing them. He had gone to the window to see Ed and Sherill, leading the sorrel, walking off through the trees in the direction of the barn.

Sight of Sherill roused a rankling humiliation in him over the beating he had taken. As he stepped out to the washstand alongside the door and rinsed the dried blood from his bruised and swollen face, he was trying to remember just where he had made his mistake in that fight. The more he thought about it, the madder it made him.

When he next looked off toward the barn it was to see Sherill astride the sorrel heading down toward the trail. A sudden and unreasoning fury hit him as he understood that this big stranger had reached some sort of an agreement with Ed. Not caring what it was, he knew only that Sherill had been sure of himself the whole day, too sure. Just now he saw a certain arrogance even in the way Sherill sat the saddle, erect and with a certain lazy grace.

Just then he noticed his still-saddled roan standing there. The next moment he was obeying an impulse too strong to turn aside. He ran for the roan and climbed into leather and walked the horse into the trees west of the trail. Beyond the creek, he kicked the animal to a hard run.

The pines thinned out half a mile below the meadow, and by some hard riding

Mitch managed to hit the trail below Sherill where the timber ringed a deep basin. He pulled in and looked back up the trail and saw Sherill before it even occurred to him that he wasn't carrying his Colt.

But a weapon had no place in his calculations and, stubbornly now, he swung aground and walked a dozen paces up the trail. He was waiting there as Sherill rode in on him.

"You again," Sherill drawled, reining in.

"Get down." Mitch's voice was brittle with anger.

"Why should I?"

"To see how good you really are," Mitch said tonelessly. "Hang that iron where you can't reach it and get on your feet."

Sherill could easily have ridden around him and out of here and Mitch knew it. But he had sampled this big man's stubbornness and was counting on it now. He was therefore unsurprised when Sherill presently took off the belt, hung it from the horn and swung aground.

Sherill drawled, "You're a bull-headed devil," as he stepped away from the gelding.

He was barely three strides away and Mitch at once dove in and swung at him. He turned sideways, taking the blow on his shoulder, not even lifting his hands. Mitch hit him again, this time a glancing blow along the jaw. Still he didn't lift his hands, although the blow knocked him off-balance.

Mitch came in fast then, pumping hard driving punches at Sherill's chest and face. And now Sherill's hands did come up. But instead of hitting Mitch he crossed his arms in front of his face and Mitch connected there solidly only once.

Sherill was taking punishment lower down and involuntarily lowered his arms to his chest. Then one of Mitch's looping roundhouse swings caught him on the side of the head and he fell sideways to his knees.

Mitch stood waiting, breathing heavily. When Sherill didn't at once come to his feet, Mitch swore feelingly, said, "Fight, damn you!"

Sherill said, "No. But you can have your fun." And, smiling broadly, he came to his feet again.

Mitch swung on him once more and he turned his head so that Mitch's knuckles only grazed his mouth. Then, quite suddenly, Mitch stepped back and lowered his hands, asking, "What the hell is this?"

"You tell me," Sherill said.

"Why didn't you let me take you on in to Ed like I wanted?" Mitch asked hotly. "Why'd you do what you did?"

"Because of what Ed would think. The way it turned out, he's sure of you. Remember the other night?"

"What about it?"

"Ed wanted you to take care of me. You wouldn't. If we'd gone in there with both of us in one piece today, he'd right now be sure you and me were playin' the same hand."

Grudgingly, Mitch admitted that this made sense. But the thought of his beating still rankled and now he said, "No one ever did that to me. Not that easy."

"That was luck. You left yourself wide open."

There was the hint of a smile in Sherill's eyes and Mitch was thinking, *I still ought to beat his ears back.* He said belligerently, "It couldn't happen again."

"Who said it could? I was lucky."

Mitch was disappointed. He wasn't even getting an argument out of this. To cover his momentary confusion, he asked testily, "What the hell are you after up here?"

"Just looking out for myself."

"With Ed Stedman as a side-kick?" Mitch asked acidly. "You're sure particular who you travel with."

"The same goes for you."

"Like hell! Ed's crooked, a killer. I may be on a lonesome, but I don't buy into anything like that. This is just a handy place to hide out. When I want to pull out, I'll ride. Ed don't swing any big stick over me. You saw what happened the other night when he tried."

Sherill reached down now and beat the dust from his knees, drawling, "You and I might work something out, Lockwood."

"Such as what?" Mitch's glance was wary.

"Such as finding out who tells Ed what to do."

Puzzlement showed on Mitch's blocky face.

"Somebody does," Sherill went on. "You

could keep an eye open and find out. And let me know."

Mitch smiled thinly. "Ed'll like to hear this."

"If you tell him."

Mitch was thinking, *Whatever his play is, he's telling me more than he should.* He was puzzled as he asked, "What else could I do for you? If I would."

"Let me know if Ed leaves the layout. Find out where he goes and how long he's to be gone."

"How do I let you know?"

"Go to Whitewater and hunt up Ned Rawn. Anyone there can tell you where to find him. Give him any word you have for me."

Mitch gave Sherill an uncomfortable look, saying, "You're a damned fool to be tellin' me all this."

"Why?" Sherill lifted his wide shoulders. "A man has to trust someone."

"Why me?"

"Call it a hunch. Call it anything you want."

Mitch didn't like this, didn't like it a bit. Yet from somewhere deep inside him rose a small run of excitement. "Then you're up here after Ed? You're not throwin' in with him?"

"That's about it, Lockwood. I'm here to break him."

"For a reason. What is it?"

Sherill's instinct had all along been to trust this man. Now he saw no reason to doubt his judgment and he said, "Because everything I own is up there in Ed's corral right now. Sixty head of horses. I'm up here after them."

Mitch breathed, "No!" incredulously.

High in the timber along the ridge that overlooked this basin stood a thickset man, tight-holding the reins of his horse. He had been watching Sherill and Lockwood and presently, for a full five minutes after they had gone their separate ways out of the basin, he stood there thinking about what he had seen, understanding little of it but knowing that it was important.

Caleb Donovan shortly rode on along the ridge, keeping well clear of the trail as he always did when he came in to see Ed Stedman and give him his orders.

IV

CALEB DONOVAN tied his horse far up the slope and went on afoot, moving awkwardly because of his massive bulk. When the cabin and bunkhouse came into sight below, he moved from tree to tree and presently had the cabin between him and the bunkhouse.

He stopped finally behind a tangle of scrub-oak above the cabin and threw a thumbnail-sized pebble so that it struck the cedarshake roof and rattled lightly down across it. Shortly, Ed Stedman appeared around the cabin's corner and stared up into the trees. Donovan stepped into sight and Ed immediately started toward him.

Waiting there, Donovan took a fresh toothpick from his pocket, idly wondering where he'd thrown the old one away. He couldn't remember, for he had been wholly engrossed these past twenty minutes in thinking of that meeting between Sherill and Lockwood that he had witnessed from the ridge below.

"Might as well come on down," Ed Stedman said as he approached. "No one's around except Slim. And he's asleep."

Donovan shook his head, saying briefly, "Up here," and led the way back up through the trees. He and Ed had argued this before and he had had his way, intending that no one but his foreman should ever know that he came here.

Now, behind him, Ed said, "Plenty's happened since you were here last."

"Sherill, you mean?"

"So that's his name, is it?" Ed's tone was surprised.

They climbed a bit farther, until Donovan could no longer see the cabin below. He stopped finally and sat on a rotting windfall, breathing hard as he told Ed, "I know part of it. Sherill was picked up in town yesterday with that mare of ours you borrowed. Why would you let him ride her in that way?"

"Let him!" Ed laughed softly. "Hell, he just did it." And he began telling Donovan about the past two days, about Sherill.

Presently they had pieced together their stories and Donovan was saying, with a touch of admiration in his tone, "He's got brains, Ed. Take that idea of handling horses through Rawn. I know Rawn. He wouldn't think of touching anything off color. Sherill's damned clever."

"We could do worse than to hang in with him, Captain."

Donovan's glance slipped around, bright with sudden anger. "You were never to call me that!" he said tonelessly. "Never!"

Ed's face flushed. "Guess I forgot for a minute," he said in some confusion.

"You did. Don't do it again." Donovan spoke almost mildly, but there was a plain enough meaning behind his words.

An awkward silence hung between them now and for a moment Donovan was uncertain of this man as he thought back upon that unsavory period in his past, five years ago, when he hadn't known from one day to the next whether the Army was going to bring him before a court-martial or accept his resignation. Finally he had been able to cast enough suspicion upon his supply sergeant, who had already deserted, to clear his name officially. But he had left the Army suspected by his fellow officers of accepting bribes, of falsifying accounts and of padding inventories.

He was guilty of all this, as was the sergeant. He had made a four-year attempt to go straight. Last year the offer of managing his niece's ranch had seemed a guarantee to an honest future. But late last year Ed Stedman, his sergeant, had tracked him down. There had never been any mention of blackmail between them. Ed had simply stayed on in Whitewater, not working, just waiting. This hideout had been Donovan's idea, a natural outgrowth of opportunity, of his wish to use Ed in some way and of his greed.

Now his thought was, *I'll have to get rid of him soon, when this is finished.* Aloud, he said, "We can work this hard all summer. Then we quit."

"What'll Sherill think of that?" Ed asked.

"Does it matter what he thinks? How much of a share did he want?"

"Half of everything beyond wages."

Donovan nodded. "How soon can you leave?"

"Where to?"

"North. To find a layout up there like he wants."

"I could get away tomorrow."

"Good. Leave Purdy in charge. Tell him to play along with Sherill but not to do anything till you're back." Donovan thought of something that made him frown. "I'd feel better about it if I knew what went on between Lockwood and Sherill."

Ed shrugged his flat shoulders. "Mitch had his dander up. You say he took a few swings at Sherill and—"

"But they talked afterward. For maybe five minutes."

"Sure. Sherill had to prove he was in with us."

Donovan's frown eased somewhat, not entirely. "I still don't like it. Have Purdy keep an eye on him."

He stood up now, a smile crossing his face as he said, "Ed, this time we don't make any mistakes. Not any. We leave all the outside work to Sherill."

"That's the way he wanted it."

Donovan nodded. "Did he see that bunch of horses we brought in three weeks ago?"

"I don't think so."

"He don't get a cut on those, Ed."

They talked a few minutes longer. Then Ed turned and walked back down through the trees and Donovan, watching him, was thinking that if Purdy turned out to be handy at working the crew he might soon be able to forget his worries about Ed and what Ed knew.

BY MID-AFTERNOON of that day Jake Henry had crossed the barren and torn low-country that isolated the foothills and was well up in the pines, pushing his mule along faster than she usually traveled. By four o'clock, he was high in the hills

and occasionally within sight of the south trail leading down from the hideout. An hour later, along a ridge that flanked the trail, he was out of the saddle and carefully studying sign, the tracks of a shod horse with a toed-in right front shoe.

Must be Sherill, he told himself. He had never before seen this particular set of tracks and that meant something, knowing as he did, by sign, most of the animals ridden by Ed's crew. So now he felt no little satisfaction in having proved out his hunch that Sherill had come back up here alone today.

It was as he would have expected. Sherill was keeping wide of the trail and would probably make a circle before coming in on the hideout. Approving of these tactics, Jake followed the sign.

A quarter mile further on, high in the timber overlooking an open basin, he came to a point where the needle-matter earth was freshly scarred in many places, telling him that the rider he was following had spent considerable time here.

He was about to ride on when he saw the heel-print.

It brought him aground and to his knees, closely studying it. Except for the Army, men in this country who rode horses didn't wear a flat-heeled boot. This mark had been made by an Army boot or one like it. Curious now, musing, *No it isn't him after all,* Jake looked around more deliberately.

He found Caleb Donovan's quill toothpick on the ground near the thick stem of a pine, along with clearer bootprints. He stuck the toothpick in the frayed band of his flat-crowned hat, and when he left the spot he swung wide of the sign, knowing he was close to the meadow and not wanting to come onto the other man.

Presently he was looking down on the two cabins, the barn and the end of the meadow with the big corral at its foot. He stayed there a good half hour, until the thickening dusk hid what lay below.

AT THE beginning of that long interval he saw Ed saunter down out of the trees and disappear into the small cabin nearby. Immediately afterward, very remotely, he thought he heard the sound of a horse being ridden away, down-country. He didn't pretend to understand the sound except that it tied in with Ed's unexpected appearance and the presence of that rider he knew had come in along this ridge this afternoon.

Much later, he caught various glimpses of Mitch and Slim, the latter walking with a decided limp. At dusk, four riders came up the trail and were turning their horses into the corral when another pair joined them. All this time Jake was closely watching the bunkhouse. Beyond not seeing Sherill, nothing indicated that he was down there. Neither the small cabin nor the bunkhouse was being guarded.

The clanging of the cook's iron at the cook-shack made Jake's mouth water. He waited until everyone—the men at the corral, Ed from his cabin, Mitch and Slim from the bunkhouse—had gone to eat. Then, thinking of his empty stomach and of the jerky and cold biscuits in his saddlebag, he mounted the mule and made a wide circle down to the trail.

As he went on, the shadows deepening about him, he was feeling a mixed disappointment and relief. The disappointment came in not having found Sherill, the relief in being fairly sure that Sherill hadn't stubbed his toe and wasn't being held by the crew back there at the hideout.

There was only one thing to do, Jake decided. Tomorrow, at dawn, he would begin watching the layout again. Sooner or later Sherill would show up.

For the first time today he was struck by the oddity of his trying to help a man he had good reason for hating. Obtusely, instead of hating Sherill, he respected himself.

His liking for Sherill was based on his instinct for admiring the finest of a species. He had good evidence that Sherill was exactly that. Yesterday his pride had been deeply hurt when he thought he had misjudged the man, when he saw Sherill with Mitch and Slim. Last night's brawl in the saloon, and their talk afterward, had corrected his false impression. He felt good about the way it had turned out. Wanting to help Sherill through this trouble came as natural to Jake as wanting to pull a fine stallion from a bed of quicksand.

Now, regardless of his hunger, Jake wanted to put plenty of distance between him and the hill-ranch. It was already dark

and, after half another hour's steady riding, he swung up through a stand of aspen and away from the trail, the starlight laying tricky shadows against the night's cobalt void. Presently, far back from the trail, he dipped into a ravine and across a narrow creek. He was working up out of the ravine when he smelled smoke.

He stopped, catching a stronger trace of burning cedar riding the slight breeze coming out of the south. The fire lay below him along the gorge. As he came down out of the saddle he was thinking of the rider he had followed along the ridge this afternoon, thinking that this might be that unknown's camp. Jake wanted a look at him.

After tying the mule, Jake worked fast down the slope above the timber-choked depression. He moved with a stealth acquired through many years of stalking game, soundlessly, his moccasined feet stirring up only faint whispers lost in the low murmur of the creek.

He had gone four hundred yards when he caught a flicker of light through the leafy aspens in the ravine's depths. Closer in, he could see the fire's gleam in under a rock overhang that jutted from the steep wall opposite. The fire lay at the lower edge of a circular open break in the trees.

He worked around so as to come in on the fire from below. On his wary circle he passed close to a horse staked out in the grass at the lower edge of the open ground. The horse was watching him. He jumped the creek a hundred yards below the fire. He hadn't yet seen the man.

The overhang was broad, perhaps ten feet above the level of the ravine-bottom. Jake worked as close in to it as he dared, finally lying flat behind a thorny thicket, holding the Navy Colt in his hand now, thumb on its hammer.

He could see a frypan sitting in the coals. An empty tomato-can lay nearby. The odor of cooking meat was strong and made his mouth water.

Suddenly from above a drawling voice sounded down: "Let me know when you get tired of playin' Indian, Jake."

The wolfer's head jerked up and he saw Jim Sherill up there peering down at him, head and shoulders showing over the edge of the overhang.

As Sherill burst out laughing, Jake swore and came erect, feeling ridiculous as he rammed the Colt back in holster and brushed the dust from his front.

He said testily, "Let me make a damn fool of myself! Why didn't you sing out?"

"It was too much fun watchin' you, Jake. The sorrel got jumpy five minutes ago. I wanted to see how good you were."

Sherill was still laughing as he slid down from the near end of the overhang and came over to the fire to join the wolfer. "Maybe this meal can make up for it," he said. "Fall to. You look hungry."

They split that first portion of the jerky and tomato stew, Sherill dumping another can of tomatoes and a handful of jerky into the pan for a second go-around. If Sherill saw anything odd in Jake being here, he didn't mention it.

Finally Jake went to the stream and sanded out the pan and, as they were waiting for the coffee to come to a boil, he asked, "Any luck today?"

"Some. I was in there. I can go back whenever I feel like it."

Jake knew that there was more to this than Sherill was telling. That could come later, he decided.

Just now he had something else on his mind and asked, "Would you know a jasper up there that wears a boot with a flat heel? That would keep shy of the trail and that would leave a thing like this lyin' around?"

He reached up to his wide hat, took the toothpick from the band and tossed it across.

Sherill picked up the quill, looking at it, an expression of seriousness slowly settling across his angular features. He said: "Lots of men use these things, Jake."

The wolfer shrugged, making no reply.

"But the boots," Sherill drawled. "Flat heels?"

"It was there, plain on the ground."

Sherill drew in a deep sigh, saying, "Today, down below, I met a man that wore a flat-heeled boot. And he was using one of these on his teeth." . . . He looked across at Jake . . . "Major Donovan. Ever hear of him?"

Jake thought a moment. "Don't he run one of those outfits down across the river?"

Sherill nodded. Then his look became

uncertain. He tossed the quill into the fire, reaching for the fry-pan, drawling, "Have some coffee! Hell, it couldn't be Donovan. I'm so spooky I'd suspect my own mother right now."

"Of what?" Jake asked.

While they drank their coffee, Sherill told him.

The next day was sultry and hot with the feel of mid-summer air.

Jean was washing the noon-meal dishes when the Major rode in from the town road to the corral. In a few minutes she heard him enter the office. Although she was curious and anxious to talk to him, she finished the dishes and straightened up the kitchen before going in to see him.

"Jean, you're damned handsome. More and more like your mother," was his way of greeting her. He came from the window and pulled the swivel chair from the desk, offering it to her, saying, "I think Jacobs will take our offer. He's writing me. Those steers don't look too bad."

It was unlike him to be this affable and as she sat down she wondered what lay behind his manner. Fairly sure that he was lying about having seen Jacobs or the culls, she now baited him mischievously and deliberately, asking, "How's the new school coming over there?"

"Slow," was his noncommital answer.

"Do the Jacobs kids still have that Shetland?"

"Didn't notice," he said. "A few more buys like this and we'll be on our feet again. By the way, Rawn seemed to have a lot of good things to say about Sherill."

"I expected that. Was he the only one you saw about him?"

"The bank. They say he can swing it."

Now, thinking of Sherill, Jean for the moment forgot her doubt of the Major. "Did Sherill mention what he was going to put on that grass?" she asked.

"Horses," Donovan told her, unable to miss the opportunity of smoothing the way for what he knew was coming.

Abruptly she remembered her reason for being here and looked up at her uncle, asking, "Who was the new driver on the stage yesterday afternoon? I'd never seen him before."

"Here either," he replied.

She knew now, definitely, that he hadn't been to Sands. He knew Ben Towers as well as she did. Rising from the chair and going to the door, she held her excitement nicely in check, saying, "Maybe it's a good thing you went over there after all."

"He'll sell to us," he said as she went out.

She wanted to see Brick now, to tell him what she knew. Knowing how strongly the Major resented her attachment to the old cook, she knew she had better wait.

It was sunny and hot outside, and she decided to work in the yard. She went out to the wagon-shed and mixed a batch of whitewash and when Sherill rode in she was painting the garden fence.

He shut the gate and led the sorrel over, drawling, "You're not afraid of the sun," as he smiled down at her, noticing her bare head.

"It doesn't hurt the plants, so it shouldn't hurt me." She answered his smile. "Would you like to see the Major?"

"No. You'll do."

He dropped the reins then and leaned against the unpainted stretch of the fence. "Just wanted to ask if it was all right for me to move into the shack down on the river. I've got a man down there now lookin' around. Can I leave him there tonight?"

"Of course. It's not very comfortable. No beds. Have you seen it?"

"Just now," he said. "We'll make out all right."

She reached up to brush aside a loose strand of hair and left a smear of whitewash across her brow. Suddenly he was smiling broadly. She felt the moistness on her forehead then and rubbed at it and when he burst out laughing she could no longer suppress her merriment, laughing too.

"You'll have it all over you before you're through," he said. "Want some help?"

"And spoil the fence? No thanks."

"There's only one way of takin' that. I quit," he said. Then, thinking this lighthearted moment as good as any for settling what he had on his mind, he asked casually, "Has the Major been away?"

She looked around quickly, her hand pausing in its stroke and hanging motionless. "Yes, but why should you ask?"

He shrugged. "Just wondered if he'd been to town to draw up that lease. I was headed in there and thought I could sign it today. When was he in—yesterday?"

She nodded and turned back to her work, wondering *Why should he want to know this?* immediately seeing that only because of her suspicion of the Major had there seemed anything odd about Sherill's question. But a moment later when Sherill drawled, "That must've been him I saw along the road a while ago," she once more suspected that his curiosity was no ordinary one.

She laid the brush across the top of the pail and faced him. "Just what are you trying to say?" she asked.

"Not a thing," he replied.

He knew then that he couldn't deceive this girl in this clumsy way and he went on, smiling guiltily, "Or maybe I am. You see, I've lost a bunch of horses, a big bunch. They were run off up into the hills and now I've found 'em. There's a thing or two I'm not straight on and—"

"And you think the Major had something to do with it?" she asked. She was angry now, her strong sense of pride and family loyalty crowding her to a defense of Caleb Donovan she knew was wrong the instant she had spoken.

"Miss, I didn't say that. I was only thinking you might—"

"You're thinking exactly what I say you are!"

She knew that she was voicing her own suspicion of the Major, not Sherill's. But fear was strong in her now, a fear that she had at last stumbled upon the explanation for the Major's strange absence.

She wasn't admitting a thing. This was strictly a family matter. So strong was that deep pride in her that she could think of nothing but the need for quieting Sherill's suspicions.

So now, before he could speak, she said, "The Major was in Whitewater yesterday afternoon. He was back in time for supper. Now if you'll be so good as to take your troubles somewhere else, I'll finish what I've started here."

He gave her a long and searching look that was wholly grave, finally drawling, "I'll ask your pardon, Miss. Maybe I was thinkin' some things I shouldn't."

"But why would you think them?" she asked, as he turned away and sauntered out to swing astride the gelding.

"The reasons wouldn't interest you."

Her curiosity brought her away from the fence and over to him. She had to know what it was he was thinking, what he had found out about the Major.

SHE looked up at him and tried to put a real warmth in her smile as she said "Perhaps they do interest me. If you're in trouble, they most certainly do. After all, we're—at least we're neighbors."

"Tell you about it later, when I know more." Sherill's dark eyes bore the trace of a smile as he reined away.

Jean stood there watching as he rode through the gate. Then, quite suddenly, a panic hit her and she turned and ran across the yard to the cookhouse, not caring that the Major might be watching from the office window.

Caleb Donovan didn't see her. He hadn't even known of Sherill's visit. Ever since Jean had left him he had been standing at the room's other window, staring out toward the town road yet seeing nothing, as his thoughts played with the possibilities opened up by his talk with Ed yesterday evening in the hills.

Now, as Jean went to the cookhouse, a movement out there along the trail cut in on his ponderings and the vacancy left his stare. A buckboard was coming in along the trail, the driver and a passenger sitting the seat.

Less than a minute later, Donovan had identified the man beside the driver as being George Lovelace. A strong sense of alarm struck through him. He picked up his hat and went out into the yard. He was standing at the gate when the buckboard swung around the corral and headed for the yard.

When the vehicle drew to a stop, Donovan nodded civilly to the driver, a townsman he knew. Then he looked up at Lovelace, saying, "How are you, Commodore?" sensing that no good was to come from this meeting.

"Couldn't be better, Captain," Lovelace said with his usual hearty smile. He climbed awkwardly from the seat, using the wrong foot on the wheel-hub as he swung aground, complaining, "Thank the good Lord I don't often have to travel this country. Riding one of these things would kill a man in less than a week."

He came over to Donovan, they shook hands, and he said, "Just wanted a talk with you, Captain. Won't take a minute. Where can we go?"

Without a word Donovan led the way on up along the fence and back toward the corral. He stopped at a point that was well beyond hearing of the townsman, so placed that he could see the yard and cabin. Then he asked, "What's on your mind?"

"Business," the Commodore replied, his smile now taking on a sly quality. "Money for you and value for me."

Donovan said nothing but stood there eyeing the smaller man warily, waiting.

Shortly Lovelace went on, "I hear you're leasing part of your place to a man by the name of Sherill."

Donovan nodded, nothing more.

A shrewd look crossed Lovelace's face. "Captain," he said smoothly, "we know enough about each other so that there's no use beating about the bush. "Am I right?"

"That's correct, Commodore."

"Then I'll state my proposition. It's simply this. As you probably know, Sherill has lost some horses. He proposes to get them back again and hold them here on your place until they're sold. If his plans work out," he went on, too absorbed in what he was saying to note the unbelieving look that crossed Donovan's face, "it's worth a thousand dollars to me to see that he loses his horses again before they can be sold."

Donovan stood there too shocked to speak. Lovelace's last words had entirely escaped him, so violent was his surprise at having discovered what Sherill really intended. *They're his, that whole damned bunch up there in the big corral!* was his thought now, anger boiling up in him.

Lovelace misread his look and quickly said, "Come now, Captain. In the old days I greased your palm often enough. It's still not to late for the Army to be interested in what I could tell them."

His words jarred Donovan back to semblance of sanity, the threat in them stemming the cold fury that was gripping him. "How much are you offering?" he asked flatly. "And what's it for?"

"A thousand was my offer. To see that Sherill loses his horses again if he finds 'em."

The confusion in Caleb Donovan's mind worked against his giving a straight answer now and to gain time he said, "This is blackmail, Lovelace."

"It's no such thing!" the Commodore bridled. "It's a simple business agreement. I have good reason for wanting to break Sherill. That reason's none of your affair. Some years ago I kept my mouth shut when you were in trouble. You owe me something for that."

"Maybe I do," Donovan drawled, in control of himself once more. "When would I get the thousand?"

"Afterwards. After you've driven off Sherill's horses."

"I'll take half now, the rest afterwards," Donovan said.

"No," Lovelace said flatly, sure of his ground.

Slowly Donovan's tight-faced look faded before a smile. He said, "I think you can count on it, Commodore."

LATER when he came up to the house after watching the buckboard until it was out of sight, he found Jean waiting for him on the porch.

"Who was that, Major?" she wanted to know.

"A man who owns a river boat," he told her. "He'd heard about our losing all those cattle and wanted to buy hides. I told him it was too late."

Back in his office the Major sat for a long time thinking of Sherill. He winced as he realized how close a thing this had been. But presently he could smile. Lovelace had unwittingly done him a favor. He experienced a small regret at realizing that he would never be collecting the Commodore's thousand, for now that he was forewarned he could deal with Sherill and move the horses deeper into the Breaks.

Tomorrow, he decided, *tomorrow I'll go on up there and tell Purdy what to do.*

Then he began wondering what sort of an excuse he could give Jean for being away tomorrow.

(Part III in the Next SHORT STORIES*)*

Doug Had No Job; Then After an Epic Adventurous Crossing, Employers Were Actually Bidding for His Services!

Trip To Monterey

By BERT DAVID ROSS

DOUG leaned over the edge of the pier, knocked the ashes out of his pipe and reached in his pocket for a chew, as he muttered, "D-a-a-a-a-m-m-n!"

He dragged out the cuss-word in the low drawling way he had of talking to himself. It sounded almost like the first part of some old sea chantey.

Doug never talked much, least of all when things were running tough for him. This was the first word he had spoken all morning except to mutter, "Straight shot," at Merry Mike's Bar and, "Stack," at K and K Cafe a few blocks up from the beach in the sprawling auto-court infested little town of Morro Bay.

He was thinking plenty, standing there looking down into the greasy water slapping the piles. "Stud'll be lookin' for me Tuesday at Anacortes . . . I got to start north today. . . . But I sure hate to leave these grounds."

Doug was flat broke as well as disgusted and a low cuss word gave vent to his feelings.

He had finally been forced to decide, "There's nothin' for it but to go back to Puget Sound. Stud'll give me a job on his purse seiner if I get there by Sunday. Sure as heck can't figure how to break into the

fishin' game 'mongst these here strangers. But I'll have to get goin'—pronto."

The tide was out. A stiff wind whipped inshore around both sides of big Morro Rock out in the Bay. Doug spit and stood watching the gob of tobacco juice fan out below him and plaster itself against the barnacled pile just before it reached the water.

"Thirty to thirty-five mile wind," he thought. Even though it did not matter now how strong a wind might be blowing, Doug could not help automatically using the fisherman's tobacco-juice wind gauge.

"Maybe I'll have a lucky break with Stud's purse seiner up there in the San Juans," he thought. "Mebbe I'll clean up enough jack so's I c'n come down to San Luis again in the fall and stick it out till I get on a boat. Mebbe I c'n make enough to buy in on a small one."

He leaned his elbows on the rail and tightened his stomach against the feeling which came over him when he knew that in another minute or two he would turn his back on this place. The Bay with its breakwaters, the colorful big Rock out there; the friendly eucalyptus trees all through town; miles and miles of rolling California hills with their dark tufts of oaks nestling in the draws. Somehow he loved it all as he had never loved any other place—even the marvelous San Juans.

Someone on shore startled Doug as a voice called out from a car which had stopped, "Is this the boat that's taking passengers to Monterey?"

CARS had been coming along the hard packed shore at the ends of the piers off and on all morning, mostly cars of fishermen bringing down supplies or gear for their boats. Doug had stopped noticing them.

He looked up. This was one of the new jobs—a chromium-trimmed streamlined sedan. Doug figured that it must have cost as much as a good second-hand abalone boat.

The black-haired Spanish-looking girl behind the wheel was waiting for him to answer. Passengers! Someone must have given her a wrong steer. These were all fishing boats. Doug turned and looked down at the one moored sideways at the end of the pier, to be sure. Of course. It was the *Mabel M*—a salmon troller. She had docked at this berth ever since the ending of war in the Pacific had re-opened Morro Bay for fishermen.

He turned back, scratching his head, getting set to answer the Spanish beauty. He would have to say something. But it had always been hard for Doug to talk to women, even to say "H'llo." To talk to a stranger, a queen like this one, took nerve.

Maybe a shake of the head would work, unless the dame had more questions, the way they usually did! He would try, anyway.

But just as he raised his eyes to her face, a car drove up and came to a stop between him and the girl. Doug heard a man ask, "You part of that bunch going to Monterey?"

The girl answered, "Yes. Is this the boat?"

"Uh-huh. Where's the rest of 'em?"

"They'll be here. I want to go aboard. What did you say it would cost?"

"Ten bucks, each. How many of you?"

"Just one. My friend here is not going."

"Better park your car over near the bank. You're in the way here."

The girl answered, "Oh, I'll send the car on to Monterey. I'm not coming back with you."

"It'll be ten bucks just the same."

Evidently she opened her purse and reached the bill from the car window. Doug saw the man shove over and stretch for it. Then he started his car and swung past hers and parked near the cliff.

The girl climbed out and the lady who was with her handed out a small leather bag and a sweater, took the wheel, turned the car around and drove off.

Doug dropped his eyes and looked down over the pier as the girl started toward him. But before she had turned the picture of her had shocked his eyes open. Her glossy mass of wavy black hair, her trim athletic body in tight white waist and tight black riding breeches and beaded cowboy boots—the sight acted on him something like a stiff shot of whiskey after a hard stretch behind the wheel of a tug.

She did not speak to him as she passed; just walked to the ladder and climbed down, jumping easily to the *Mabel M's* deck.

Doug did not feel right—a girl like her going out on the old *Mabel M,* up that rough stretch of water to Monterey, especially with Blount skippering.

Blount was no fit skipper to take out a small craft, carrying passengers, in a gale like they were apt to face today. He had almost smashed up twice, just on the short run between Avila and San Simeon, salmon fishing.

"I bet he ain't never even been in Monterey Bay," thought Doug. "I bet he's trustin' to run by the chart. Probably figures if he can't make money fishin', maybe he c'n make a go of it haulin' sightseers. Ten dollars a head. He can't pack on more'n ten safely. That's only a hundred bucks."

He realized that it must have been Blount in the car—the man who had taken the girl's money. He was coming across toward the pier now. He stopped at the road, watching several cars stringing down the sideways sloping cut in the cliff. They were probably the rest of the passengers.

Doug had never seen Blount shaved and dressed up. In fact he had only seem him a couple of times before and that had been at night in one or another of the town bars. Blount was in fishing clothes then, a stubble of beard on his face. These California bars! Their owners seemed to try to make them dark.

Doug remembered one night at Merry Mike's. The fishermen and the bums from the abalone boats—fellows who cleaned up four or five hundred a week and drank it as fast as they made it and then (as Tony told him) lived on welfare or in jail during the closed season—had spilled their jokes and dirt after Blount pushed through the door and zig-zagged across the corner to the Square for a different brand of beer, in a different crowd.

Tony, the night-shift bartender at Merry Mike's, had happened to be near Doug, and Doug had asked him, "He own a boat?" indicating Blount by tipping his head toward the front door as the man went through it.

"Him? That's Blount. He thinks he does!" sneered Tony. "To hear him tell it you'd think he owned a whole fishin' fleet." He mopped up the bar both sides of Doug and in front of the couple next to him in that nervous way a bartender does when he works on a cut of the take and is on edge all of the time trying to keep the customers drinking.

Doug ordered another bottle of beer.

Tony went on, as he opened and poured it, "He won't last long enough. Nobody lasts long once they try to buck Appaloni. When Blount bought his boat he figured he'd make a killin'. His boy was goin' to sell all the fish Blount caught, truckin' 'em over into the valley to the Portuguese farmers. Went all right till Appaloni got word to them farmers by his underground. Then they didn't want any fish, whenever Blount's boy come 'round with fish. Hell!"

Doug had heard, long before he quit fishing in Puget Sound and joined the Navy and was shipped to the camp at Morro, about Appaloni and Verocchi, the two kings of the fishing business. Up north he had seen men busted, trying to buck the powerful ring which controlled fishing in those waters. Blount or anyone else down here who tried to buck Appaloni would be just a plain damned fool.

Now as he watched the string of cars come down the sloping road from Morro and stop near where Blount was waiting, Doug thought, "That's why Blount's tryin' to get out of fishin' an' make a go of it, carryin' passengers."

There were fifteen in the party. And Doug heard one of them tell Blount, "There's four more coming. They stopped up town for some more drinks."

Doug straightened up and turned to stride ashore, then caught himself. "Heck! Fifteen —four more is nineteen, and the Queen down there on the *Mabel M*—that's twenty! Gosh Almighty! A gang like that—they'll shove one another off the deck once they get out where the big swells are runnin'!"

He kept his mouth shut. It was not up to him to say anything. He watched as the men and women parked their cars and carried their coats and packages and cases of beer out to the end of the pier.

"How do we get aboard? Is that the boat —that little thing?" they asked.

Blount climbed down to show how it was done and stood by as several of the men followed. Doug could not see the Spanish girl anywhere. He remembered that he had not seen her since she went on board.

The women climbed down, some with loud unrestrained remarks about the awkward ladders, others squealing as the wind whipped their skirts high.

Blount climbed back up the ladder, to hand down the cases of beer and the bundles.

Dough noticed that he looked sick and that he seemed to be stalling for time. He kept looking up the road toward Morro, his face worried.

"Well, when do we cast off, skipper?" called one of the men.

"Pretty soon now—soon's my deck-hand get's here," Blount answered.

Doug heard him swear, "Damn that Salvini!"

Salvini! So that was the guy Blount was waiting for! Doug knew Salvini would not show up: he was a man who had gone out on the *Enterprise,* who had already been aboard her when Doug first came down that morning. Doug had heard the crew joking and laughing with this Salvini about something. That was it, probably—they were jeering about how Blount would have to make his trip to Monterey without a deck hand.

He realized that Blount had stopped pacing up and down the pier and was looking at him.

"How'd you like a trip to Monterey?" Blount asked, coming close enough so that the noisy crowd down on deck could not hear him. "Ever work on a boat?"

Doug nodded. "How much?"

"Oh it wan't cost you anything!"

"How much? What you payin'?"

Blount laughed nervously. "Oh yes—paying! Why, five bucks."

Doug turned his back and spat over into the water. The gale was strengthening. The gob of tobacco juice, caught by a gust, broke into a spray which fanned out a foot wide before it hit the choppy waves of the incoming tide.

"You're a damn fool—takin' twenty on on thet tug when ten would be a load," said Doug, facing Blount. "A forty-mile gale blowin' and you a' quarterin' it! I'm a plum damn fool fer goin' a'tall—but make it ten and I'll go."

"All right! All right! Ten. I'll give it to you once we start back from Monterey."

"No—you'll give me five of it now."

Doug figured that if Blount agreed, this trip would get him as far as Monterey. He'd leave the boat there and he would at least have five dollars—enough to see him as far as Seattle by hitch-hiking.

"All right! All right!" Blount dug up a five-dollar bill and gave it to him.

Doug turned and walked to the ladder and climbed down to the *Mabel M.* He had the engine running before Blount followed him into the cabin.

Doug started toward the deck and waited at the door until Blount ordered, "Cast off. Stern line first. Stand by the bow line till I swing the stern out."

The passengers were setting up folding deck chairs around the outside of the cabin as the *Mabel M* picked up speed through the winding channel under the lee of huge Morro Rock.

". . . landmark of the California coast since"—"stories from the days when Monterey was the only port between Mexico and Alaska"—"called it the Gibraltar of the Pacific—"

Doug caught some of the remarks of one gray-haired gent with a snow-white Van Dyke. He imagined he must be a professor—the man looked the way Doug fancied a professor might look.

Suddenly Blount cried out to Doug, "Here! Take the wheel! I—I got a pain!" He hung to a cabin rail and eased himself back on a bench. His face was almost purple and was covered with ugly red blotches.

"That's something!" thought Doug. "How does he know I can even handle a wheel? And he asks me to run her through the breakwater!"

THE narrow opening between the north and south wings of the huge breakwater was only a hundred yards ahead. Doug had never run it, but he had walked out on the shore end of it plenty of times and had watched the fishing boats go in and out of it.

It looked different, from behind the wheel.

Here, he could judge better the size of the swells. One of the big ones had just come through, hitting the opening at an angle, its great wings burying the breakwater, flying into clouds of spray which drove before the wind like snow in a blizzard.

Even here, a hundred yards inside the opening, the swell lifted the *Mabel M* and held her high in the air, her propeller racing free out of water.

The crowd of men and women shouted and squealed. Blount lifted his head where

he sat doubled over and Doug saw his blotched face in the glass.

The gale swung the *Mabel M* quartering to the Channel before the swell passed. Doug headed back toward the opening. He figured it would be about two minutes before the next big swell was due. By putting on full speed he could make it.

He wondered as he cut through the smaller waves and rode out into deep water safely whether Blount would have known enough to speed up and get through or if the big one would have caught him right between the two arms of the breakwater.

If it had, the troller would have swung helpless and piled on the rocks, her propeller racing in the air as the huge wave lifted and carried her on its crest.

Doug headed straight out, bow splitting the swells and throwing spray thirty feet in air. The gale plastered the spray back against the deck and he could hear angry shouts from his passengers. They began crowding into the cabin, some thoroughly drenched. One blonde whose hair had been a mass of tightly marcelled curls, burst in with a man's coat over her head. When she elbowed her way to where she could see herself in the glass, she swore.

One of the men, unsteady from too much drink, lunged against Doug as the *Mabel M* rose on a swell and then dove down the other side. The fellow clung to Doug trying to right himself.

Doug took one hand from the wheel and jabbed backward into the man's stomach and heard him "ugh!" and drop on the floor. "Blount!" Doug yelled out. "Get up here at your wheel!"

He would be damned if he was going to take the responsibility of navigating, with the cabin crowded with these men and women. He knew that they would be seasick; ten minutes in the stuffy cabin and with the boat pitching would do that all right. Some would go outside, not caring whether they lived or died, and they would wash overboard.

Blount, his face a sickly gray now, pushed his way to the wheel. Doug said, as he turned loose, "I'm goin' out an' run a couple of lines around the hand rail stanchions. You should 'a' done that before we started. Somebody'll wash overboard. Where's your rope?"

Blount started to answer, then clamped his mouth shut, ducked his head and stood gripping the wheel, pulling back and staring straight ahead, like a fear-crazed driver of an auto as he plows into an unavoidable crash.

"Heck!" thought Doug as he elbowed his way down the three steps to the tiny forecastle. "He looks just like a sea-sick landlubber!"

WOMEN jammed the steps and one screamed a string of oaths as Doug stepped on her foot. The two narrow bunks and the three-foot alleyway housed five men and women.

Doug had to disregard white slacks and tailored breeches and silk stockings as he forced his way to the storage space under the locker and pulled out a coil of half-inch rope and carried it up the crowded steps.

Up in the cabin, one of the young men who was with the girl with the yellow curls asked Doug calmly, "What's wrong, mate?"

"Hand lines," Doug answered. When he had pulled the heavy coil of rope out on deck, the young fellow was there behind him.

"Better let me give you a hand. It'll be tough going, for one guy."

The young chap seemed to know what to do. He took the end of the rope, made his way forward as Doug uncoiled it and by alternate pulling and walking, circled the cabin with it.

"Think that's enough?" he asked Doug, after measuring off an extra thirty feet. He pulled out his knife and waited for Doug's nod.

"How d' you want to do it—each start at the bow and work both ways?" the lad shouted above the gale.

Doug nodded again. They went forward and started, taking a half-hitch around each stanchion.

Suddenly Doug realized by the listing of the boat that the *Mabel M* was off course, quartering into the waves. "Damn Blount," he thought, "he's tryin' to work her north already, and we're only five miles out!"

He heard voices and a woman's scream from the cabin. The *Mabel M* had slewed sideways almost to a forty-five-degree pitch, as the wave caught her. Probably the crowd inside the cabin had been knocked around,

Dough thought. Maybe one of the women had fallen against the sharp-cornered boxing which covered the front of the engine.

He watched his chance and jumped for the cabin door. He would have to make Blount head back into the wind, at least until the extra ropes were strung on the deck rails.

The door was jerked open before he reached it. A man stood there, wide eyed, his face jaundice-colored. "Help! Quick! Something's happened to the skipper! He dropped, right there at the wheel! Quick!"

Dough sprang through the door thinking, "What the heck! Don't any of the poor boobs know enough to grab the wheel and straighten her out? They'd stand there and let her—"

He stopped. At the wheel, her trim long legs spread out to straddle the body on the cabin floor, stood the black-haired Spanish girl. She was fighting the wheel, the muscles of her arms and shoulders showing tense under her water-soaked white waist.

Doug plowed his way to her, knocking men and women aside. He grabbed Blount's legs and dragged the inert hulk out of the way and reached around the girl's body and gripped the wheel, his hands beside hers. Her body pressed back against his for support, moving with him as their arms worked the wheel around until the old *Mabel M* straightened herself once more, head into the gale.

"Good work, Miss!" Doug managed to blurt out as he finally let go the wheel with one hand and stood to one side.

The girl turned. Back of Doug several of the men had knelt beside Blount's body, and she joined them.

It seemed only a minute before Doug felt her hand on his shoulder. Steadying herself against him the girl whispered, "He's dead! That leaves you in command. We think you should order blankets wrapped around him and someone to sit by his head—and not tell the others. We don't want any hysteria or a panic. We can say he's sick, can't we?"

Doug nodded. He felt a strange tingle in his throat and breast—different from the tingle a man gets out of a big shot of whiskey. This girl! It was funny—he had not felt awkward when he stood with his arms around her at the wheel. And she was just like an old buddy now, understanding what he wanted without his having to put it into words.

In the mirror he saw the men half lift, half drag Blount over against the boxing which covered the engine, after they had wrapped a blanket around him.

He saw the cabin door open. The young chap who had been helping him string the ropes on the stanchions came in.

The girl had come back and was standing near Doug when the young chap pushed his way across to them.

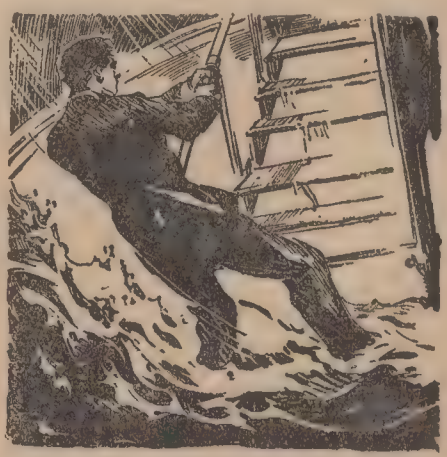
"Dolores! Why did you come? You know it isn't safe! You know your uncle will be furious!"

She stared straight ahead through the cabin window as though afraid or unwilling to face the lad. "Uncle doesn't know. He thinks I drove to Monterey."

"But why *did* you come?" he repeated.

She swung around. "Well, why did you come?" she demanded angrily.

The young fellow tried to speak low enough so that Doug could not hear. "You know why I did! It was Elaine's party, she



asked me. I tried to get her to wait until the *Santa Maria* was finished. But I didn't care—you had said that you never wanted to see me again!"

The dark girl flung out her answer. "And you know why I came! I hate her—her and her yellow hair and her doll face! I knew she'd get sick, and I wanted to see how you liked her when she was throwing up—I wanted to stand beside her at the rail when she was leaning over. And if she wanted to fall overboard, I wasn't going to stop her! I'd help her!"

"You mean—you mean you'd shove—?" He gripped the girl's arms and shook her. "You hate her so much you'd—"

She jerked loose, pushing the husky young chap so hard that he stumbled back. "I'm not going to let her have you! I love you! And I hate that—that—"

DOUG wished he had not heard the word she used. He did not think nice girls used such words. And he thought of how his arms had been around this girl and how the tingle which her body had sent through him had seemed to be such a nice clean innocent thrill!

Yet here she was practically admitting that she had planned to push the girl with the yellow curls overboard!

He would have to do something.

"Hey, you!" he said, glancing over his shoulder at the young man.

"Me? What is it, skipper?" the lad asked, coming close.

"I got to have help. You want the job?"

"Sure. I'd help you anyway, without your asking."

"Okay. First off, put this girl down in the forecastle and lock her in!"

The lad swung and caught hold of Dolores, saying, "You heard the skipper. Orders are orders! No use fighting, Honey!" He picked her up in his arms and Doug over his shoulder saw the twisting squirming trim young body relax gradually and the struggling arms embrace the lad's neck as he carried her away.

The gale seemed to be increasing. The compass read southwest as the *Mabel M* kept veering to hold her head into the wind.

"We'll never make Monterey," Doug figured. "If this gets much worse, we'll never make land. We'll swamp when we try to turn."

Each time the big swells lifted the little craft high in air the propeller raced free. Doug tried to keep from thinking about engine trouble, but when the young lad came back across the cabin, Doug said, "Take the wheel. I want to check the engine."

He turned down the grease cups, checked the oil and gas and leaned over the faithful power plant, listening and putting himself in tune with it, feeling it and making himself sensitive to it. He could not have told another person what he was doing. But he could have told at once if something, anything, inside the block had been wrong.

This was a type of marine engine for which Doug had never cared much, back in the Puget Sound country. But he almost patted the old block now, saying "Huh." The engine, had it been human, would have felt praised. It would have read in the way he said "Huh! I did you wrong! You're better than I thought!"

He came back to the wheel. "Go aft in the hold," he said to the lad. "Check the bilge. What's your name, in case I have to yell for you?"

"Tommy," the lad said, giving over the wheel and pushing his way to the door.

The breath of fresh air cut across the stench inside the cabin. Most of the men and women were sea-sick by this time and they had not all managed to reach the pails. The cabin floor was a filthy slippery mess.

There was nothing for it; the cabin would have to stay dirty. The passengers would be mad when they found that they weren't going to Monterey, after all. They would be peeved when they had to pay for having their clothes cleaned, after this. Of course they might be able to collect their ten-dollar fares from whomever would own the boat when Blount's affairs were straightened out. But that would take time.

Doug thought, "Heck! If we ever do reach shore, I'll be farther from Seattle than I was to start with. And I've lost the best part of a day, to boot. Probably now I'll miss gettin' on Stud's purse seine crew. Damn!"

He turned back to the work in hand. "I got the job of bringing this boat and bunch of folks to shore safe, if I can. I'll have to run for Avila and dock there!"

Tommy returned to report the pump working O. K. but the water rising in the hold.

"Get out the life belts," Doug ordered. "I don't know where you'll find them or how many. Strap 'em on the women first. It won't do no good if we capsize—only to make it easier for searchers to find the bodies."

In the mirror he saw Tommy searching. There were only three belts on board. Tommy put two of these on a couple of middle aged women and made his way with the

other one to where Dolores was locked with half a dozen others in the forecastle.

When he returned and came up to stand near the wheel Doug said: "I'm going to try turning. Unlock the forecastle. If you feel us going over, jerk them folks out. It won't be no use—we'll all sink. But they won't feel so bad if they're not locked in."

Tommy stood for a moment staring at Doug. He blurted out, "But—Dolores! She can't drown! I love her! . . . You talk like there wasn't a chance! I guess you're right. I know you're right, if we swamp when we try to turn."

Doug kept his eyes on the big swell coming. "Well, we may all be safe enough—once we can turn around. But maybe I won't make it. We're ten miles out. You couldn't swim your gal ashore—" the big swell hit them, hoisting the bow up at nearly a sixty-degree angle—"in this!"

"When you're ready to try it," implored Tommy, "please let me get Dolores up here beside us. I'll watch her—"

"Go after her now. I'm tryin' it—before we spring more leaks."

They came back together. Doug saw them stop in the corner of the stuffy cabin and pull at the tangle of men and women and he saw Dolores lean over and say something to the girl with the blonde curls—curls which were now ungainly stringy hanks of washed-out yellow hair.

Doug braced himself against the big wave and rode the old *Mabel M* through it; and before the rudder and propeller lifted into the air, he swung five points to port. As they took hold again diving down into the next trough, he turned a few points farther and took the next wave at a sharp angle.

It listed them dangerously but they rode to the crest. Here the wind caught the bow as though it had been a sail, slewing the old boat further around.

This was what Doug had expected and he was ready for it. He raced the engine as soon as the propeller took hold going down into the trough. He spun the wheel hard to port.

They were more than half around as the next wave lifted them. Doug knew that if they had been broadside the swell would have slewed the boat over. But hitting them at a slight angle, stern first, it cascaded over the open stern and over the cabin and they shook free and rode back into the air on their keel.

He heard Dolores cry out, "Look, that's the *Anaheim!* Uncle must have found out we were at sea in this gale and he sent her to help us!"

Doug saw the powerful tug a quarter of a mile south.

Tommy answered the girl, "Now if we're wrecked, there's at least a chance we'll be picked up."

"Better check the bilge again," Doug ordered. "We're not goin' to be wrecked, less'n that wrench we took opened up a seam. We can ride her out, now, into Avila."

THEY made port. The *Anaheim* docked almost before Tommy, working single-handed, could throw bow and stern lines to the men waiting on the dock.

Men crowded aboard. Tommy led a scrawny little old chap who wore a badge to where Blount lay.

Others helped the sick and sour-smelling passengers to their feet and supported them as they went out of the cabin and were half-carried from the deck to the dock.

Doug mixed with the crowd and pushed his way unobtrusively through the door. He had started to climb off when Tommy called to him, "Doug, come here! The sheriff wants to talk to you!"

The sheriff asked, "What's your name, young feller?"

"Torgasen. Doug Torgasen. I got to get started quick as I can. I got to be in Seattle tomorrow night, sure."

The old man glanced up at Doug quizzically. "'Fraid that'll have to wait. Got to hold an inquest. Do some investigatin'. Looks like you'd have to stick around these parts a few days anyway."

"But my job! If I don't get there—"

"Can't help that!"

Tommy asked, "What sort of a job you going to, Doug?"

"On a purse seine crew."

There was a bustle outside and soon a well-dressed dark-complexioned man of middle age strode in, two husky chaps at his heels.

Dolores cried, "Uncle!"

The man asked, "What's this I hear—Blount dying? Who ran the boat? I watched

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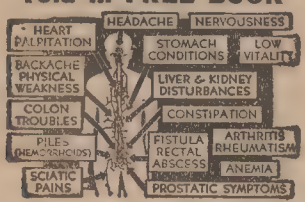

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you—I was thinking I'd tell Blount he was a better man than I thought he was. I aimed to make him a proposition. Now I find it wasn't Blount—he was dead all the time! Who run the boat? Did you, Dolores? Did you, Tommy?"

He had a quick jerky way of talking, without waiting for answers to separate questions.

Tommy introduced Doug. "Meet Dolores' Uncle, Mr. Appaloni."

"Appaloni!" exclaimed Doug.

"Yeah, Appaloni. Ever hear of me?"

Doug for once managed to talk. "Yes, sure, I fished all my life, up in the San Juan country. But Appaloni! Why, everybody up there knows Appaloni!" he grinned.

"They do? That's fine! That's fine! Say—I want you—on one of my boats . . . skipper. I never saw anything better than the way you—"

"Just a minute, Appaloni!" interrupted Tommy. "Dolores and I have made up. We're going to be married. I want Doug myself. I want him to skipper the *Santa Maria.*" He turned to Doug. "I own twenty abalone boats that I lease, up near San Simeon. I've just built a new eighty-foot pick-up tug, the *Santa Maria.* I've been looking for a good skipper." Facing back to Appaloni he said, "I want him for that job!"

Dolores stepped over and took hold of Doug's arm and smiled at her Uncle. "After all, he brought Tommy and me together, when I thought it was all off between us. You ought to let us have him, Uncle—a sort of wedding present! He saved my life and Tommy's. We want to do something for him."

"All right!" Appaloni grinned at the three of them—Dolores and Tommy with Doug between them. "After all, you're the one who's got to take over when I croak, Tommy, if you're going to marry Dolores. I guess it's all the same—whether you have him or I have him—"

Doug's head was whirling. A minute before, he had been without a job! These two—they had not either of them asked if he would take a job—yet they were squabbling over who was to have him! Maybe it was lucky after all that he had started on that trip to Monterey!

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by

PETE KUHLHOFF

The Anti-Gun People Are Still At It

THE Attorney General of the United States has recommended legislation requiring the Federal registration of all firearms excepting shotguns and .22 caliber rifles.

"A registration law," he claims, "will place difficulties in the way of organized gangsters who may endeavor to equip themselves with firearms for the purpose of carrying on their criminal activities."

In the first place, it is hard to imagine a gangster being interested in possessing a heavy caliber sporting rifle for carrying on his nefarious activities. Its bulk, weight and muzzle blast are undesirable for his work. But you can bet your bottom dollar, if he wanted one, he'd get it registration or no registration.

As to pistols and revolvers, take a look at the record of every state that requires either registration or a permit for their possession. These laws definitely have not disarmed the criminal! But in many instances, the honest citizen is prevented from the legal possession of means of defending himself and his property.

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Getting back to the sporting rifle—say a hunter wants to borrow a rifle from a friend. He is immediately surrounded by a maze of red tape, spending perhaps several days filling out forms and waiting for their return before he dared take possession of the borrowed rifle. This is just one of the many nuisances such a set-up would bring into existence.

The real danger of such a law, however, is national in scope, and memory is indeed very short. A few years ago the army was tearing its hair out trying to find a sufficient number of shooters with the necessary experience in handling small arms to qualify them as instructors for training a large army so urgently needed.

Due to the foresight of the War Department in maintaining its Director of Civilian Marksmanship and of the National Rifle Association a key group of shooters (not enough, mind you) were available for this work.

Now, with such a registration law as the Attorney General has requested, the average shooter sportsman would be so encumbered with red tape (to say nothing of the additional taxes that would be necessary to carry out and enforce such a program) that he would no doubt dispose of his guns and take up knitting.

Also with world conditions as they are who can tell what may happen? Anyway, in the event of invasion or the taking over of a country by an organized minority the surest way to disarm the citizenry is to procure the firearms registration list. Ask any of the boys who took part in the invasion of Europe!

At this writing in January, 1947, it is impossible to say how Congress will react to the Attorney General's suggestion, but those of us who are opposed to such registration would do well to keep our eyes open and in the event that any such bill is proposed, to waste no time in contacting our Senators and Representatives and expressing our opinions as strongly as possible.

The .270 in the Northwest

HERE is a letter from a SHORT STORIES reader who lives in British Columbia. He has brought up a number of points that may be of interest to other readers.

I own a .270 caliber Model 70 Winchester, equipped with a peep sight which I don't find at all satisfactory.

I have stopped running deer at 250 yards, and have missed shots where a sling shot would have been an ample weapon. Maybe it's me and not the sight. I dunno. But I can't seem to draw as fine a bead as I would like.

I would like to know what in your opinion is the best scope to buy as regards power, and whether cross hairs or post.

I hunt the Caribou for moose and deer, and the odd bear, and all I want is a sight that when I am "on" will put the bullet where it should go.

I know you have answered questions relative to scope sights innumerable times because I have been reading SHORT STORIES for twenty years, but I never owned a high-powered rifle before, so didn't pay much attention.

Just how accurate is a good .270? What is this minute of angle business on sight adjustment? I know you prefer a .30-'06 but hunters I have spoken to, and we have some good ones here, claim a .270 just as good if not better for ranges over 300 yards.

I am going to Seattle this spring and figure on picking up a scope there. Would appreciate it very much if you would drop me a line.

In case you are interested, there is some fine grizzly bear hunting not so very far from Vancouver, either in Ramsay Arm, where there are an estimated 250 bear in a valley two miles wide by about fifteen long, Kildala Bay in Rivers Inlet is also very good and very easy hunting.

The head of Knight's Inlet is, as the saying goes, lousy with bear. As a matter of fact, anything up to a half dozen can be seen on the beach most any time, in the fall. I am referring to grizzlies, not black bear.

In conclusion, what do you think of the Poly-Choke in regards to better pattern, range, etc.? W. J. B.
Vancouver, B. C.

SOME shooters seem to have a misconception of how to use a rifle equipped with a peep sight. Aiming with ordinary open

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sights consists of so aligning the sights and the target that the front sight appears in the notch of the rear sight, and a prolongation of this alignment strikes the target.

To many shooters "drawing a fine bead" is the act of lowering the front sight as seen in the notch of the rear sight. In other words, seeing less of the bead.

This can't be done when using a peep sight, which is located on or near the receiver of the rifle, unless the open iron sight is left on the barrel, and then with great difficulty.

It is surprising to note the number of shooters who make this mistake, *i.e.*, leaving the open sight on the barrel after a peep sight is installed. The open barrel sight should definitely be removed.

The proper way to sight when using the peep or aperture near sight is to merely look through the peep hole and place the top of the front sight on the target. There is no concerted effort of centering the top of the front sight in the aperture as the eye does this automatically. In fact, the less conscious the shooter is of the rear sight, the better. For hunting, the target disc which contains a very small aperture should be removed.

The shooter should "target in" his rifle, no matter what sights are used, as this is one thing that no one else can do for him. This seems strange, but it is a fact.

To my way of thinking, the peep sight is the fastest of all sights, especially so at close ranges.

For most conditions a hunting telescope sight of 2½ or 3 power is best. All the ones now being manufactured seem to be very good.

My personal preference is the Lyman Alaskan, possibly because I have used it the most.

The Alaskan has a magnifying power of 2½ diameters and the field of the view is 40 feet at 100 yards. The focus is practically universal and the light transmitting power is excellent. The proper eye relief is 5 inches, but the full field of view can be seen whether his eye be 2½ or 6½ inches in rear of the eyepiece.

There is a choice of seven different reticules. And there is also a difference of opinion among shooters as to which is the most desirable. I prefer either the number 5,

which is a tapered flat top post (its top subtending approximately 3½ minutes) with horizontal cross wire or the number 7 which is plain medium fine cross wires.

Before we go any further let's look into this minute of angle business. In order to make changes in impact on our target while using the same point of aim we change the adjustment of our sights in minute of angle units or fractions thereof. This adjustment of sight is not generally done in the field, but when we are "sighting in" the rifle.

To understand what a sight minute means we consider our problem in terms of circles, whose circumferences are made up of minutes.

There are 360 degrees in a circle and 60 minutes in each degree, or 21,600 minutes per circle. In other words, each minute is 1/21,600 of a circle

Our most common shooting distance is 100 yards or 3,600 inches. Now 3,600 is the radius of our circle so the diameter would be 7,200 inches. The circumference would be pi (3.1416) x 7,200 inches or 22,619.52. One minute of angle is 1/21,600 of this circumference or 1.0472 inches.

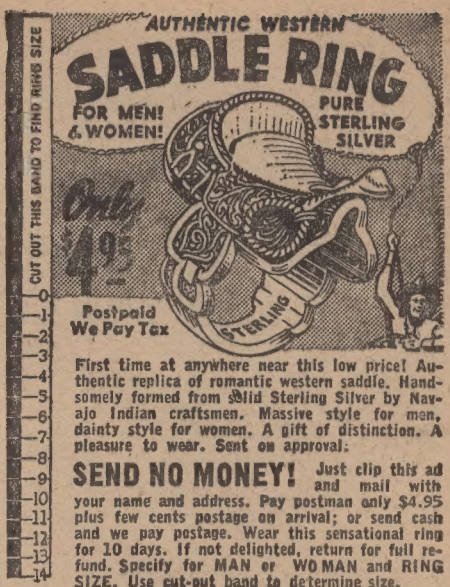
For practical purposes we disregard the fractional part and call a minute of angle an inch at 100 yards. That would be 2 inches at 200 yards or ½ inch at 50 yards, etc.

As a matter of information, the scoring rings on our standard rifle targets for 50 feet, 75 feet, 50 yards and 100 yards are spaced one minute of angle apart.

Most receiver sights with micrometer adjustments are calibrated in minutes of angle and fractions. Generally, each click on the adjustment represents ½ or ¼ minute of angle.

Of course, the effect of the movement of the adjustment screw on the impact of the bullet depends on the distance between sights, or the sight radius.

For example, the Lyman-48 receiver sight on the old .30 caliber Springfield Sporter and similar .22 caliber Springfield Arsenal rifles gives a sighting radius of 27⅞ inches. The elevation screw has 25 threads per inch and ten clicks per turn. Each click of the elevation screw then causes a slight movement of 1/25 of 1/10, or 1/250, which is



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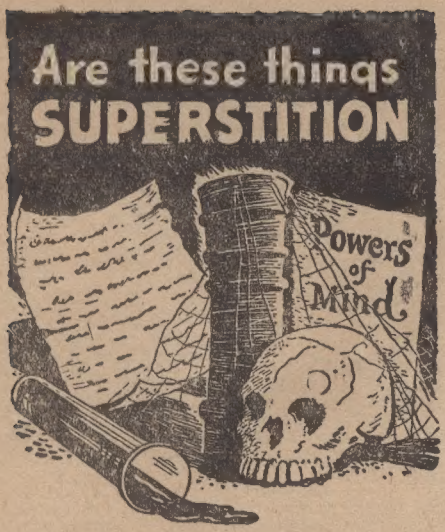

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.004 inch. The deviation this causes on the target is 3,600 inches times .004 inches divided by 277/8 inches or .5165 inch, which is practically ½ minute of angle.

The windage screw has 32 threads and 8 clicks, or a movement of .0039 inch per clock.

The deviation in impact per click is .5054 inch, or slightly over ½ minute of angle.

The .270 and the .30-'06 are two of our best big-game calibers, both being very accurate and having good killing power.

The cartridge cases are very similar, the .270 being a necked down .30-'06. As a matter of fact, the same headspace may be used in either.

The general run of factory ammo. for the .270 is a little more accurate than that for the .30-'06. But the best .30-'06 and .270 are about the same.

The recoil of the .30-'06 is greater than that of the .270.

The .270 has it over the .30-'06 at 300 yards on medium game. The 130 grain load really does the business.

But with the larger game I believe the .30-'06 to have the edge. The 180-grain bullet does the job except on say, the largest bear, where it is advisable to use the .220 or .225 grain bullet.

The latest designs of 180-grain bullets such as the Remington, Core-Lokt and the Winchester Silver tip are very good grizzly medicine.

With both caliber rifles sighted in for 200 yards the .270 130-grain load is easier to hit with at 300 yards, as the bullet drop is only about 7½ inches. The .30-'06 would be around 11 inches.

If a person does a lot of shooting the .30-'06 is less expensive, especially for the hand-loader.

Either caliber is excellent for all-around shooting and hunting.

The Poly-Choke, the Weaver Choke and the Cutts Comp give the shooter the advantage of being able to change from one degree of choke to another. In other words, the proper choke for various ranges may be easily obtained by manipulation of the choke devise or by changing tubes.

Tell me more about grizzly hunting in your part of the country!

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GIVE ME a skinny, pepless, second-rate body —and I'll cram it so full of handsome, bulging new muscle that your friends will grow bug-eyed! . . . I'll wake up that sleeping energy of yours and make it hum like a high-powered motor! Man, you'll feel and look different! You'll begin to LIVE!

Charles Atlas

Actual photograph of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Let Me Make YOU a NEW MAN —IN JUST 15 MINUTES A DAY

You wouldn't believe it, but I myself used to be a 97-lb. weakling. Fellows called me "Skinny." Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. I was a flop. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—"*Dynamic Tension*." And it turned me into such a *complete* specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

That's how I traded in my "bag of bones" for a barrel of muscle! And I felt so much better, so much on *top of the world* in my big new, husky body, that I decided to devote my whole life to helping *other* fellows change themselves into "perfectly developed men."

What Is "Dynamic Tension"? How Does It Work?

When you look in the mirror and see a healthy, husky, strapping fellow smiling back at you — then you'll be astonished at how *short* a time it takes "*Dynamic Tension*" to GET RESULTS!

"*Dynamic Tension*" is the easy, NATURAL method you can practice in the privacy of your own room — JUST 15 MINUTES EACH DAY — while your scrawny shoulder muscles begin to swell, ripple . . . those spindly arms and legs of yours bulge . . . and your whole body starts to feel "alive," full of zip and go!

One Postage Stamp May Change Your Whole Life!

As I've pictured up above, I'm steadily building broad-shouldered dynamic MEN — day by day — the country over.

2,000,000 fellows young and old, have already gambled a postage stamp to ask for my FREE book. They wanted to read and see for themselves how I'm building up scrawny bodies, and how I'm paring down fat, flabby ones — how I'm turning them into breath-taking human dynamos of pure MANPOWER.

Take just a few seconds NOW to fill in and mail the coupon at right, and you will receive at once my FREE book — "Everlasting Health and Strength"— that PROVES with actual snap-shots what "*Dynamic Tension*" has done for others — what it can do for YOU! Address: **CHARLES ATLAS, Dept 93, 115 East 23rd Street, New York 10, N. Y.**

FREE

Mail the coupon below *right now* for my FREE illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." Tells all about "*Dynamic Tension*" methods. Crammed with pictures, facts! Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 93, 115 E. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

MAIL COUPON— NOW—FOR FREE BOOK

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 93, 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of "*Dynamic Tension*" will help make a New Man of me — give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

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UP TO **$653.50**

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